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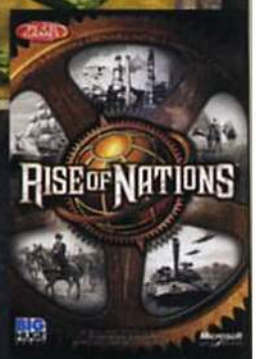

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editorial

Sixth sense and synchronicity

AGAINST COINCIDENCE

When the space shuttle *Columbia*, which had carried the world's first Israeli astronaut into space, broke up over the town of Palestine, Texas, earlier this year, the theme of synchronicity crept into the news. Like 9/11, the *Columbia* disaster was a tragedy in which the troubled American psyche sought significance in what would, otherwise, be brutally *meaningless* events.

But were the odd coincidences connected with the disaster (see p5) really just a matter of chance?

The psychoanalyst C G Jung spent much of his life trying to make sense of meaningful coincidences, evolving a theory of 'synchronicity' that flew in the face of received wisdom. He would have agreed heartily with Fort's feeling that "in the explanation of coincidence there is much of laziness, and helplessness, and response to an instinctive fear that scientific dogma will be endangered." (Fort, *Wild Talents*). Like Fort, Jung believed there was indeed a fundamental "underlying oneness of all things" that might explain apparant connections between inner and outer events. Lucia Ring-Watkins, in her article on p42, looks at Jung's theory, explaining how he drew on both psychology and quantum physics to posit a mechanism that could explain the 'meaningful' elements of such events as the *Columbia* crash... and a host of other anomalies too.

COVER IMAGE
GETTY IMAGES/TIM MACPHERSON

THE TWIN THING

While Jung searched for theories that might account for telepathic and other phenomena, one of the Holy Grails of parapsychology has been to satisfactorily demonstrate an actual instance of telepathic communication. Guy Lyon Playfair has been conducting a number of experiments seeking to capture telepathy in action and has obtained some fascinating results. In this issue (p34), he explains why he believes that the best case for telepathy may depend on pairs of identical twins.

FT's files bulge with odd stories involving twins – twins who experience each other's pain, twins separated from birth who have gone on to lead remarkably parallel lives, twins who appear to exhibit telepathy. Guy's work with identical twins seems to demonstrate that the bond between these pairs is strong enough for some kind of communication at a distance to take place; whether telepathy is a unique component of 'the twin thing' or whether identical twins are simply demonstrating a particularly strong example of a common phenomenon, is something that future research – although probably outside of the scientific mainstream – may reveal.

JÜRGEN HEINZERLING: 1959-2003

As we were going to press, we received the sad and unexpected news that Jürgen Heinzerling, author of our recent feature on Erich von Däniken, died on Saturday 5 April of a cerebral hæmorrhage. Jürgen was a respected writer at home in Germany, a passionate fortean and a great friend to *FT*; he will be sadly missed by us all. Our thoughts go out to his family at this time.

We'll be working on a tribute to Jürgen for a future issue of *FT*, including the publication of his final article for us.

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

What do we mean by fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about Fortean Times but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 79

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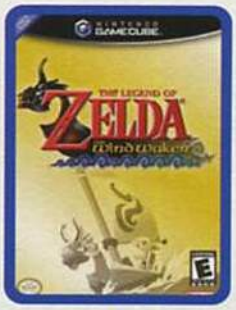

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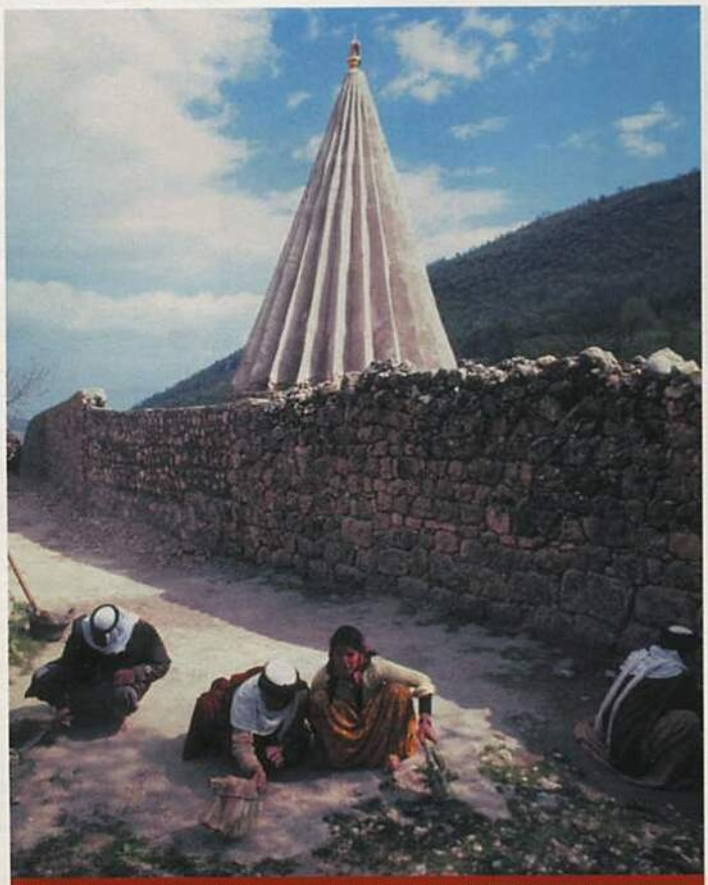
strangedays

Yezidis in peril

The struggle for Mosul threatens the survival of the Yezidis, an Iraqi sect often maligned as devil-worshippers



NIK WHEELER/CORBIS

SUNDOWN: A conical Yezidi tomb with ridges representing the Sun's rays.

THE WAR IN IRAQ THREATENS not only ancient sites in the cradle of civilisation, but also pockets of ancient religions, such as the Assyrians, the Mandeans (who worship John the Baptist), and the Kurdish Yezidis, misleadingly represented as devil-worshippers. The main centre of the Yezidi faith is the village of Bashiqa (pop 5,000), 30 miles from Mosul. Before the present hostilities, it was in the northern no-fly zone but outside the Kurdish-controlled region. It sits in the Mosul plain at the foot of Mount Maqlib. Surrounding olive groves produce the sacred oil for Yezidi temple lanterns, and distinctive, conical Yezidi tombs dominate the hills. The metal ball topping the slender dome of the pale sandstone tombs represents the sun, and 12 vertical stone ridges radiating down from the ball represent its hallowed rays and the hours of the day.

Few Yezidis have ever wandered far from their Iraqi roots

Basically derived from the Persian Zoroastrian fire religion, Yezidi beliefs also incorporate Mithraic, Sufi, Gnostic, Jewish, and shamanistic elements. They have adopted Christian rituals like baptism and a smattering of practices from Islam ranging from circumcision to removal of shoes inside temples. Yezidis venerate Sheik Adi bin Musafir, a 12th-century Lebanese-born Arab mystic whose tomb, in Lalish, northern Iraq, is their main place of pilgrimage. They say Sheik Adi revived a faith dating back to Adam.

Yezidis pray three times a day, at dawn, midday and sunset, facing the sun. Their reputation for satanic worship stems from *Malak Taus* (the Peacock Angel or Lucifer), the central figure among the seven Archangels or Avatars they venerate (Yezidi is from the Arabic word for 'angel'). In Yezidi cosmology, the Supreme deity created a pearl, which broke after 40,000 years. Malak/Lucifer used the remains of the pearl to create the material world. He was forgiven for his transgressions, and those who revere him are the spiritual elect of humanity. They are forbidden from referring to him as Satan. His tears of repentance are said to have doused the flames of hell, putting it permanently out of business. The Yezidi story of the creation of man follows the Judeo-Christian Adam and Eve, except that Satan is portrayed as a wise teacher rather than a tempter.

The Yezidi temple at Ain Sifni near the Kurdish border, a place of great cultural heritage adorned with a black stone snake and sacred signs, is at risk in the current war. The veneration of their saints' tombs means few Yezidis have ever wandered far from their Iraqi roots, although there are branches in Turkey, Syria, Iran, the Caucasus and, because of modern migrations, Germany. Estimates of their numbers vary wildly from 750 to 300,000. One source says there are 60,000 in Iraq and Syria, and 200,000 worldwide. Yezidi elders worry about their dwindling numbers, since Iraq's desperate economic plight has pushed the young to emigrate. "The young want a better life," said Prince Tahseen Sayigh Aly, the hereditary Yezidi ruler. "Of course we are worried about disappearing, especially since the young cannot marry outside the faith."

The *Meshaf i Resh* or Black Book, attributed to Sheik Adi's son, forbids Yezidis to eat lettuce or butter beans, wear dark blue, wash alone in the bath or pass water standing up. They cannot put on underclothes while sitting down. There is, however, a suspicion that the Black Book was written by a non-Yezidi and lacks coherence. There are strong parallels between the Yezidi and the *Ahl-i Haqq* or *Yarsani* of Iran (who include the *Shaitan-parastiyyan*, Satan-worshippers) and the *'Alevis* (or *'Alawis*) of Syria, Turkey and Kurdistan. These three groups make up *Yardanism*, combining Sufism, crypto-Zoroastrianism and pre-Islamic indigenous belief. There are some curious variations: the *Ahl-i Haqq*, for instance, use a nutmeg during initiation ceremonies, where the Yezidi continue to venerate the walnut.

It is tricky to identify the origin of Yezidi taboos. According to Falah Hassan Juma, a Yezidi teacher, the ban on lettuce arose from the Yezidi massacres by the Ottoman caliphs in the 18th and 19th centuries, with thousands of the faithful slain in the lettuce fields then dotting north-eastern Iraq. Watching the blood of innocents gush into the greens prompted a lasting aversion to the vegetable. However, according to a sect elder, a 13th century ruler of Mosul ordered a Yezidi saint executed. The enthusiastic crowd pelted the corpse with lettuce heads, since when there have been sanctions against salad. A third explanation was given by a Muslim in Mosul, who said that the Yezidis believe that the lettuce houses Lucifer, so they refuse to chop the heads off the roots.

London Times, 14 Dec; New York Times, 27 Dec 2002.

TALKING ANIMALS
Carp spouts Hebrew, cat talks Turkey – animals have their say
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UFOLOGY
Classic radar-visual case on line, panic in the MOD and conspiracy theory survey
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DOOMWATCH
How the advent of comet NEAT sent skywatchers reaching for their Nostradamus...
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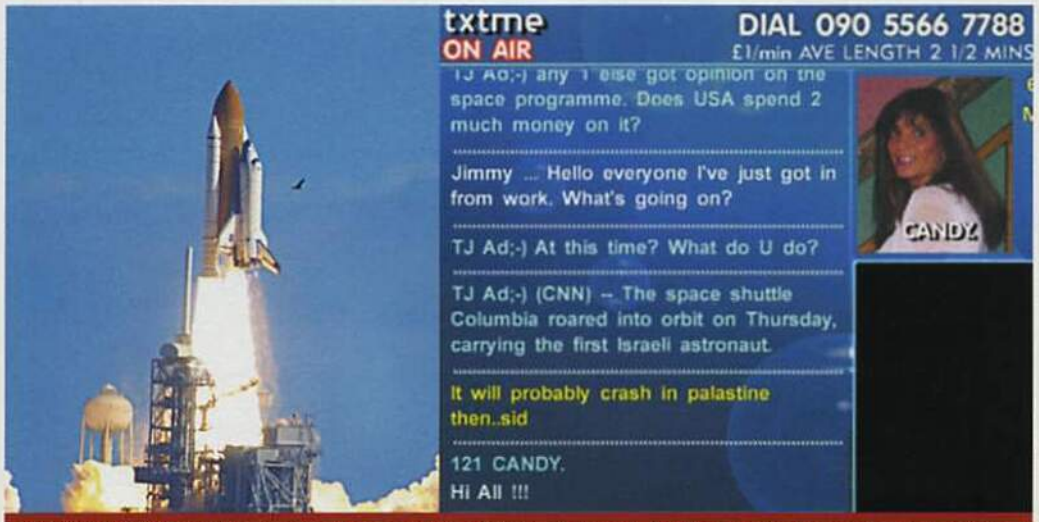
Shuttle synchronicities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TJ Ad;-) At this time? What do U do?
TJ Ad;-) (CNN) -- The space shuttle Columbia roared into orbit on Thursday, carrying the first Israeli astronaut.
It will probably crash in palastine then..sid
121 CANDY.
Hi All !!!
CANDY

NASA

PROPHECY IN TEXT: On the morning of space shuttle Columbia's launch, Txt Me TV carried a prophetic exchange.

Another American tragedy yields a crop of unlikely coincidences

The loss of the space shuttle *Columbia*, which disintegrated in a huge fireball as it re-entered the Earth's atmosphere over Texas on the morning of 1 February 2003, was accompanied by a number of seemingly significant 'coincidences'; over and above the obvious blow to American self-confidence and the tragic loss of seven lives, people found deeper messages in the shuttle disaster.

Perhaps the first hint came in a prophecy from a most unlikely source. Txt Me TV is an interactive news channel (transmitted on Sky 686) in which viewers use their mobile phones to take part by sending text messages. On the morning of 16 January, the day of *Columbia's* launch, a hosted 'text chat' show was taking place in which the TJ (text jockey) had drawn attention to the fact that the shuttle was carrying Israel's first man in space, 48-year-old Col Ilan Ramon. The following exchange between the TJ and a viewer took place on screen:

TJ Ad;-) (CNN) – The space shuttle Columbia roared into orbit on Thursday, carrying the first Israeli astronaut.
It will probably crash in palastine then..sid [sic]

Some weeks later, shortly after 9am on 1 February, the *Columbia* did indeed "crash in Palestine" as pieces of the craft plummeted down over an area including the town of Palestine, Texas. Commentators and ordinary Americans found more than just coincidence at work in this disaster. After all, on the threshold of an American war on Iraq, the death of an Israeli astronaut who had, in his earlier air force career, participated in a 'pre-emptive' attack on an Iraqi nuclear reactor, seemed uncanny. The fact that his craft had broken up in a rain of debris over George Bush's home state, and in particular over the oddly named Palestine, was clearly pushing the powerful symbolism a bit too far. This latest tragedy had occurred within days of the anniversaries of the Apollo 1 fire of 1967 and the *Challenger* shuttle disaster of 1986.

Commentators found more than just coincidence at work here

As Americans puzzled over these signs, anti-US fundamentalists knew exactly what to make of them. Rogue Muslim cleric Abu Hamza, recently banned from preaching in London's Finsbury Park Mosque, announced that the crash was "a punishment from God" and the shuttle's crew had formed a "trinity of evil against Islam" because they included Americans, an Israeli and a Hindu (another of the shuttle's crew had been Kalpana Chawla, the first Indian-born woman in space). *www.counterpunch.org, 1 Feb; Observer, 2 Feb; Guardian Unlimited; Ananova, 3 Feb 2003.*

EXTRA EXTRA

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD

WORLD-FIRST TEST FOR FAT CLOTS DEVELOPED
Queensland Times, 17 June 2002.

ROYAL SHEEP BAN U-TURN
Farmers Guardian, 31 May 2002.

PARENTS CONDEMN UNDERWEAR
Gloucester Echo, 27 April 2002.

JOY FOR TOWNS AT LAST AS PHANTOMS VANISH AGAIN
Guardian Messenger (Adelaide), 5 June 2002.

HULL MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION
Yorkshire Post, 6 June 2002.

SUICIDAL RATS HELP TACKLE BLACK DOG
The Australian, 6 June 2002.

DICK TURNS TO CHURCH
Adelaide Advertiser, 7 June 2002.

GIGANTIC GOLDFISH TO BECOME DIPLOMAT
Scotsman, 8 June 2002.

WHITES YOU CAN LOVE FOR PERSONALITY, PRICE
Minneapolis Star Tribune, 13 June 2002.

ROOS PAY $2000 FOR ATTACK ON KEBAB MAN
Melbourne Age, 13 June 2002.

BANANAS A THREAT TO PLATYPUSES, SENATOR SAYS
Melbourne Age, 13 June 2002.

COLONIAL RESTRAINING ORDER INVOKED TO PREVENT PIG MEETINGS
Irish Times, 18 June 2002.

ARGENTINIAN PARROTS INVADE MADRID
Independent, 18 June 2002.

Wonder-webs!

Are enormous webs the work of millions of very busy spiders or evidence of sinister government experiments?

MATTHEW G WHEELER

ABOVE: Thousands of spiders on the web they have spun between posts of an old and new fence line.

At the end of October, Brian Thair, a biology professor at the College of New Caledonia in Prince George, northern British Columbia, spotted a silky, white spiders' web stretching 60 acres (24 hectares) across a triangular clover field Russell Jervis had farmed since 1944. A barbed-wire fence on wooden posts surrounded the field about four miles (6km) east of McBride in the Robson Valley.

It looked as if the whole field was covered with an opaque, white plastic. The thin, elastic material was not soft and fluffy like webs built by individual spiders. There were about two *Halorates ksenius* spiders per square centimetre laying the silk. Near the perimeter fence, the web showed great tensile strength – enough to put a handful of coins on it without them falling through. "The web swept up over the fence like a breaking wave of surf on a beach, and then came down the other side towards the highway," said Mr Jervis, 83.

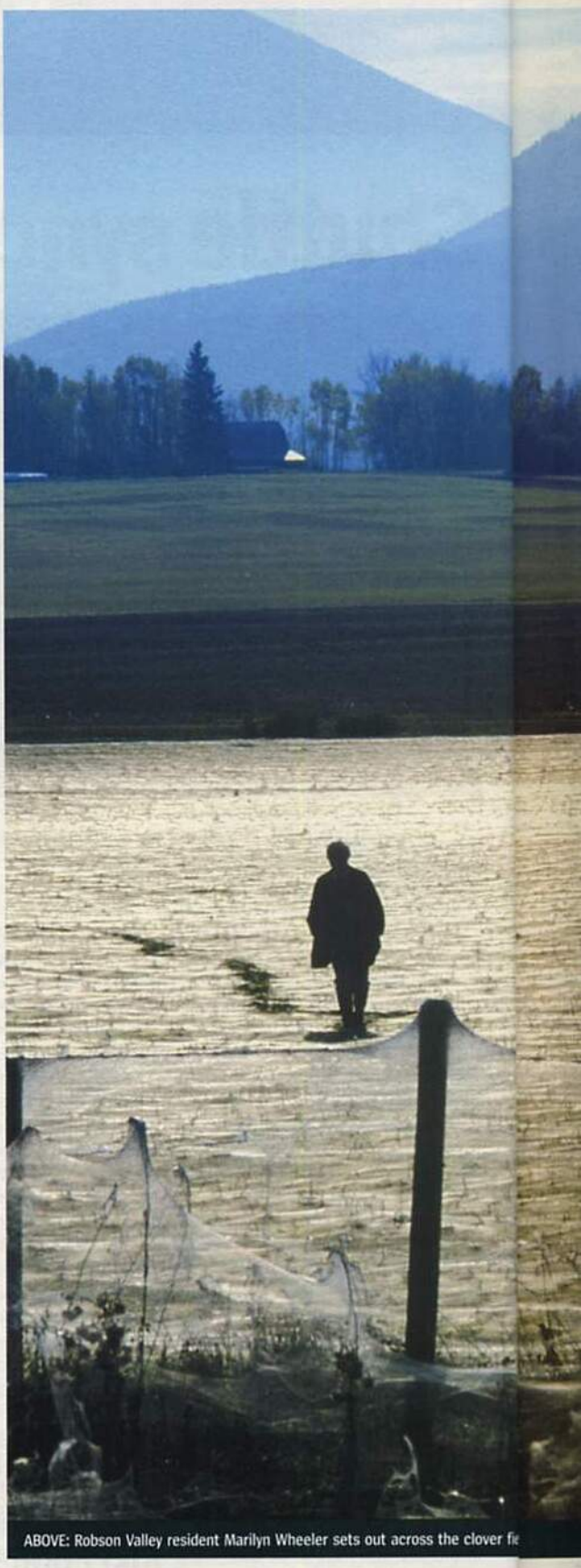
MATTHEW G WHEELER

The brownish spiders, each about three to four millimetres long, were dragging lines of silk, ignoring each other as their efforts created the web. Dr Thair estimated there were hundreds of millions at work in the field.

Hundreds of millions of spiders had been at work

Since they didn't seem to care if an occasional insect stumbled into their construction, he didn't think it was built for trapping purposes.

Normally, when young spiders reach reproductive age, they spin a sort of silk parachute which is then caught by a breeze and lifts them into the air – it's called "ballooning". Where the spider lands is where it makes its home. Thair guessed that because of too much rain or insufficient wind, the spiders were unable to balloon, so stayed in the field and multiplied. But it was a mystery how so many spiders managed to survive so close together for so long. Perhaps they had encountered an enormous quantity of high quality, nutritious prey. By late November, snowstorms and wind had blown away much of the web. *CBC News, 22 Nov; Vancouver Sun, 29 Nov; National Post (Toronto), 30 Nov 2002.*



ABOVE: Robson Valley resident Marilyn Wheeler sets out across the clover fi

MATTHEW G WHEELER

ABOVE: Walter and Val Jervis examine the handiwork of millions of tiny spiders covering a fence on their Robson Valley farm.

On 20 December 2002, the skies above Galveston and parts of Brazoria counties in Texas were filled with floating, shimmering strands and fuzzy, luminescent wads. People in La Marque, near San Luis Pass, and in Pearland reported seeing the webs constantly between about noon and 5pm. Poles, trees and shrubs were left wrapped with the sticky stuff. An article on the Internet prompted speculation that the webs were fallout from a chemical plant leak, or radar chaff used by military aircraft to avoid detection and enemy fire. A few said the phenomenon was a migration of hatchling spiders. Most correspondents, though, thought the webs were connected to 'chemtrails'. They believed the government was mixing unknown chemicals in jet fuel and spraying them, via jet engine exhaust, on unsuspecting people below. Samples were sent to the S&N Labs of Santa Ana, California, where Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy identified the presence of protein, suggesting the material was spider web. Similar web rains and so called 'angel hair' have been reported over the years. "Hundreds of thousands" of webs fell over Santa Cruz, California, on 8 October 2002, and on 22 December 2000 web-like material fell from the sky in Oregon shortly after three military jets were seen flying back and forth in an east-west flying pattern. For more on chemtrails and falling webs, see Mark Pilkington's FBI report in ***FT124:22-23***. *Galveston County (TX) Daily News, 21 Dec 2002, 11 Mar 2003.*

MATTHEW G WHEELER

Eight-legged invaders

A spiny 'Red Army' of monster crabs that devour everything in their path is on the march from northern Russia and could work their way as far south as Gibraltar. Descendants of a scheme initiated by Stalin in the 1930s to bring food to the barren Soviet Arctic, the Red King or Kamchatka crabs can live for 30 years and grow up to a metre (3ft 3in) across from claw tip to claw tip. They were imported from the Pacific, but escaped into the wild and in the past 10 years have advanced 500km (310 miles) along the Norwegian coast. They are thought to number around 12 million – no one knows what caused the population to rocket in the 1990s. Each female produces 300,000 eggs a year, coming up from the depths in winter for the spring mating season. Adults can weigh up to 10kg (22lb). "If their eggs get in ships' ballast water," said Maren Esmark of the World Wildlife Federation (WWF), "they could cross the North Sea or the English Channel. If they get to Britain they would eat all your clams, mussels and seaweed and the worms in the sand."

Norwegian fishermen have a love-hate relationship with the crabs. They sell the meat in fish markets, but the crabs tear their nets to shreds. The WWF is calling for unlimited crab fishing to remove the threat to the environment posed by the invaders. The WWF also wants the UN to put pressure on Oslo to halt the crawl. No one knows how far south the seabed stormtroopers will advance before the water gets too warm or they run into tougher predators. Cod, catfish and even seals prey on the soft-skinned young crabs before they develop the armoured shells of the adult. It's possible they will halt at Lofoten, just inside the Arctic Circle. In the Pacific, where seabed competition is tougher, the crabs have ventured as far south as Vancouver Island and northern Japan. *[R] Moscow Times, 4 Feb; D.Express, 5 Feb 2003.*

talks to them, we recommend a psychiatrist, but this is different. This is one of those historical times when God reveals himself for a reason. It has sent spiritual shock waves throughout the Jewish community worldwide and will be talked about throughout the ages." *Forward, Jewish Week, 14 Mar; New York Times, 15 Mar; Observer, 16 Mar 2003.*

Some time last year, Saree Khantanikorn, 55, of Tambon Suan Prik, Ayudhaya, Thailand, caught a *pla mhor* (climbing perch) and took it home. He knew it was special because it's head looked like that of a lion fish. Its gills were always open and it had whiskers on its upper lip. He was so taken with it that he popped it in a glass tank in which he kept another fish.

One full moon night, he heard someone talking. "I got up to see who was there," he said, "but all I could see was that the two fish were facing each other. So I went back to bed. Then the voice came again." He jumped out of bed, lit some joss-sticks and offered up a prayer, which seemed to do the trick – the voice fell silent. Since then, he has lit joss-sticks every full moon. If he forgets, the voice returns.

Pramuan Meepan, Chief of Fisheries Conservation and Development in Ayudhaya, was sceptical of this story. "I can assure you that no mutation in a fish would allow it to speak like us," he announced. K Saree's neighbours, however, were not so sure. They occasionally gathered outside his house and called to the fish to reveal "great secrets" such as lottery numbers. "K Saree plans to keep the fish," reported the *Phuket (Thailand) Gazette* (16 Nov 2002). "But he wants the gawkers and pursuers of greater truths to go away. 'I'm not sure which is crazier,' he told them, 'you or my fish'."

OTHER TALKING ANIMALS

Batyr, the talking elephant of Kazakhstan, became famous in 1977. A recording of the phenomenal pachyderm – saying "Batyr is good", "Batyr is hungry" and using verbs like 'drink' and 'give' – was played on Kazakh state radio in 1980; and by 1983, Batyr's vocabulary had risen to 20 phrases, including the local equivalent of "Have you watered the elephant?" He passed away in Karaganda Zoo in September 1993.

In August 1978, thousands of Ugandans believed that a tortoise was prophesying trouble for President Idi Amin. 'Big Daddy' himself held a press conference in which he threatened to execute anyone trading in such rumours. According to the government's report, the tortoise waddled into a local village police station and demanded a private audience with the provincial governor and police commissioner, having a message for their ears only. The last report on the tortoise was that it was "under arrest" in Kampala jail... although the jailers were quick to deny it.

A black cat called Cingene (Gypsy) appeared on Turkish television news on 20 March 1993, and managed to say at least seven words: *Ver* (give), *Nalan* and *Derya* (girls' names), *Demem* (I don't say), *Naynay* (baby talk for music), *Nine* (colloquial word for grandmother) and *Babaanne* (formal word for grandmother). According to *FT*'s Turkish correspondent Izzet Goksu, these words were clearly audible. The Turkish press had reported an earlier talking cat in 1968.

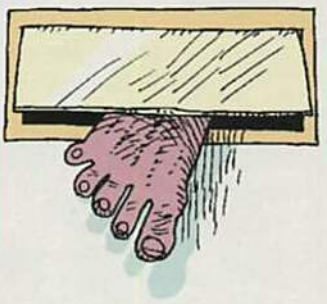
DAVE NEEDHAM

There is an African tradition that portentous messages are often delivered by animals. According to Ugandan state radio in June 1992, a goat proclaimed that the AIDS epidemic was a divine punishment for disobeying the Ten Commandments. The goat spoke in a "loud, terrifying voice" to the villagers of Kyabagala, but died a few hours later.

In 1999, Kenyan cowherd Vincent Owando Liech, 72, witnessed an angel carrying a book appear astride one of his cows. When the book was opened, the cow spoke, saying: "You must construct a new church which should be dedicated to prayer for peace. Do not say you were not warned."

The message was made public in Kisumu on 30 December, and garnered widespread support.

SIDELINES...



MARTIN ROSS

LEG POSTED

LaMara Lane from the Alaskan town of North Pole was shocked to receive part of her dead father's leg in the mail instead of the gourmet "Lobstergram" she was expecting. She is suing Identigene Inc for $1 million for breach of contract and mental anguish. The Houston firm had carried out DNA tests for an inheritance court case involving Mrs Lane. It said it had complied with a court order to return the samples. *[R] 30 Jan 2003.*

BRAIN OF THE MONTH

A 21-year-old man was taken to hospital in Modesto, California, after his head was split open by a brick. Police, who found the injured man, suspected foul play, but witnesses said the man had been trying – at 2am – to see how high he could throw a brick. In the darkness he lost track of the brick and was unable to get out of the way when it fell. "Alcohol was involved," said a police spokesman. *Merced (CA) Sun-Star, 10 Dec 2002.*

DUMB MOVE

A Montana man who changed his name to Jack Ass is suing the makers of MTV's stunt comedy show *Jackass* for giving him a bad name. Mr Ass, who changed his name from Bob Craft in 1997 to highlight the dangers of drink-driving, is seeking damages of at least £7 million for defamation of character. *Bournemouth Daily Echo, 2 Jan 2003.*

ASKING FOR IT

Gheorghe Paschu, a 72-year-old Romanian, has been hit dozens of times by cars, suffering concussion and broken bones. "I just can't resist jumping out into the middle of the road when I see a car coming," he explained. Insurers have decided to stop paying his medical bills. *Sunday Times, 13 Oct 2002.*

SIDELINES...

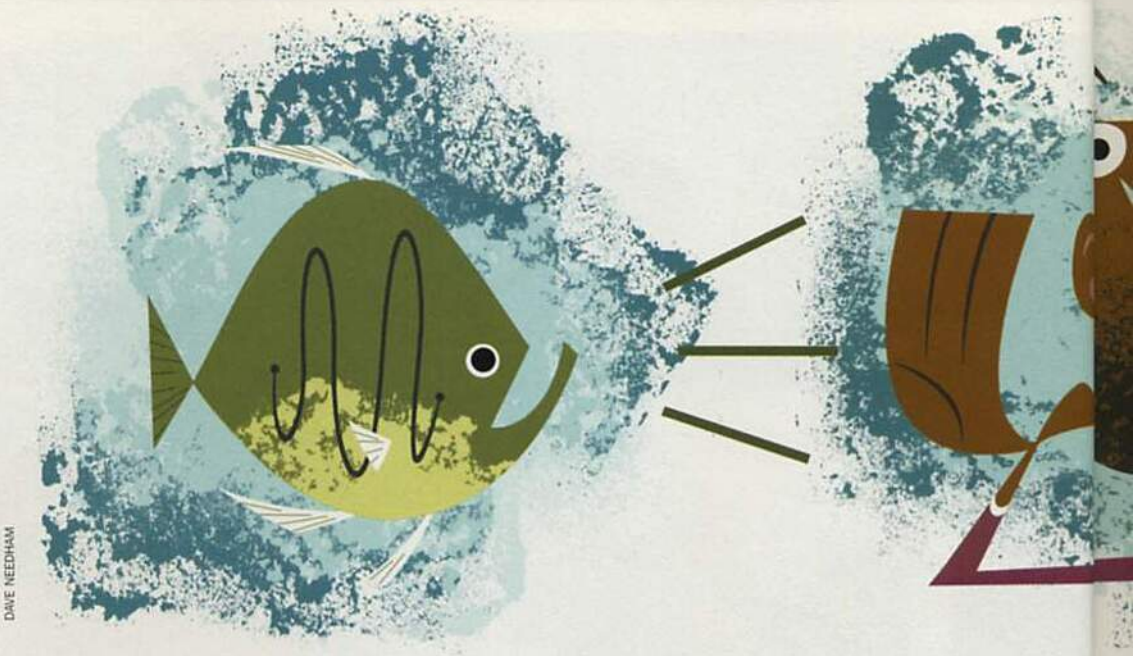
GIBBON BITES NAMESAKE
Jack Gibbons, six, from Abbots Leigh, Somerset, was bitten by a gibbon in Phuket, Thailand, where he was on holiday with his family last January. Jack's father had been filming the primate swimming in the family's pool, when it jumped out and bit the boy. *North Somerset Eve. Post, 22 Jan 2003.*

POT AND KETTLE
Speaking at the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Kuala Lumpur in February without a hint of irony, President Mugabe of Zimbabwe questioned the legitimacy of President Bush's election victory. *Metro, 26 Feb 2003.*

LIBRARY BURNS AGAIN
On 2 March, the library in Alexandria, Egypt, recently rebuilt at a cost of £150 million and opened last October, was damaged by fire on the fourth floor, blamed on a short circuit. Sixteen fire engines put out the blaze in about 45 minutes, and 29 people were treated for smoke inhalation. The original seat of learning, founded around 295 BC by Ptolemy I Soter, suffered several fires before being burnt down in the 4th century AD. *[R,AP] 3 Mar 2003.*

PLEASE RELEASE ME
A 51-year-old woman picketed the Catholic diocese of Norwich, Connecticut, after she was refused the services of an exorcist. She claimed to be possessed by 19 demons that had been speaking in tongues and "moving her eyes without permission". *Sunday Times, 9 Feb 2003.*

EX-PAT HIPPOS
Ten Nile hippopotamuses roam among the ruins of a lavish ranch at Puerto Triunfo, 100 miles (160km) north of Bogota in central Colombia, leaving huge footprints in the mud and scaring the local cows. They are all that remain of a private zoo assembled in the 1980s by Pablo Escobar, the cocaine baron shot dead by police in Medellin in 1993. Most of the animals were confiscated, but the hippos remained and became naturalised. Six of them were born in a muddy lake near the Magdalena River. *[R] 23 Jan 2003.*



DAVE NEEDHAM

Fish fingers the ungodly

NY carp has religious message; Thai perch just chats at night

For the last seven years, Luis Nivelo, 30, an Ecuadorean immigrant, has worked as a fish-cutter at the Fish Market in New Square, New York, about 30 miles (48km) northwest of Manhattan. The story goes that at 4pm on 28 January, he lifted a live 20lb (9kg) carp out of a box of iced-down fish and was about to club it in the head when it said something unintelligible. In shock, he fell among the slimy wooden packing crates that covered the floor. Then he ran into the front of the store screaming, "The fish is talking!" and pulled Zalmen Rosen away from the phone. Mr Rosen, 57, is a father of 11 and a member of the Skver sect of Hasidim. His family owns the fish shop. "I screamed, 'It's the devil! The devil is here!'" said Mr Nivelo. "But Zalmen said to me, 'You crazy, you a meshugeneh [nutter].'"

However, when Mr Rosen approached the fish he heard it speaking in Hebrew. "It said 'Tzaruch shemirah' and 'Hasof bah,' which essentially means that everyone needs to account for themselves because the end is near," he said. The fish commanded him to pray and to study the Torah and identified itself as the soul of a childless Canadian Hasid who died last year, identified by local gossips as Moshe Yehuda Geshtetener, who had come back to Earth to perform *tikkun* (healing). Geshtetener often bought carp at the shop for the Sabbath meals of poorer village residents.

A third fish-cutter, Zalmen Moshe Rosenfeld, also bore witness to the piscine utterances. Overwhelmed, Mr Rosen accidentally cut his thumb with the knife he was carrying and was taken to hospital. The fish flopped off the counter, back into the carp box. Attempts to identify it were fruitless and it ended up in a packet of gefilte fish.

The story soon spread among the 7,000 members of the Skver sect, and throughout the Hasidic world, inspiring heated debate, Talmudic discussions and derisive jokes. A gefilte fish manufacturer considered changing his advertising slogan on a local radio station to "Our fish speaks for itself", but decided people would be offended. Some Hasidic sects believe that righteous people can be reincarnated as fish. "Two men do not dream the same dream," said Abraham Spitz, a New Square resident. "It is very rare that God reminds people he exists in this modern world. But when he does, you cannot ignore it."

Some saw the incident as a warning about the impending war in Iraq, fearing that the Christian fundamentalist oil men of the Bush junta see the war against Babylon as the first round in the battle of Armageddon. Others considered it as fictional as Tony Soprano's talking-fish dream in an episode of *The Sopranos*. Some pointed out that the Jewish festival of Purim, which started on 17 March, is marked by merriment and pranks, which might explain things. However, it appears from the news reports that the story had been circulating for some weeks before this date.

"Ah, enough already about the fish," said Mr Rosen on 15 March. "I wish I'd never said anything about it. I'm getting so many calls every day, I've stopped answering. Israel, London, Miami, Brooklyn..."

Luis Nivelo, a practising Christian, still believes the babbling carp was the devil. "If this was a story concocted by a bunch of Jewish guys, it might be suspect, but this Luis... he has no idea what this means," said Matisyahu Wolfberg, a local lawyer. "If people say God

DAVE NEEDHAM

SIDELINES...

MOAN GOAL
A drug dealer who complained to police after they parked a caravan promoting an anti-drugs campaign outside his house was jailed by a Teeside court for seven years. *East Anglian Daily Times, 3 Jan 2003.*

AMPHIBIAN CONFUSION
Television viewers in Romania were puzzled when six documentaries from Discovery Channel Europe – including ones on World War II, Egyptian mummies, and submarines – were all broadcast with the same subtitles about the life of frogs and tadpoles. *Ananova, 23 Oct 2002.*

SEX SWITCH
A man and wife in Hungary have become the first married couple to swap sexes. Dr Laszlo Pajor led the operation in the southern town of Szeged where the double sex change surgery had been successful. However, when the "new woman" was taken to the female ward to recover, other patients refused to accept her and she had to be sent back to the male ward. *D.Express, Irish Examiner, 18 Oct 2002.*

STINK ALERT
A box of Durian fruit in the hold of an Australian passenger flight led to a full-scale chemical alert at Brisbane airport yesterday. Ground crews followed their noses to the notoriously fœtid tropical fruit and discovered it was covered in powder. Only after the plane had been evacuated and sealed off was the substance found to be carpet deodoriser. *[AP] 17 Jan 2003.*

URBAN SPRAWL
From the *Exeter Express & Echo* last January "We would ask people to be patient and to stagger when they go into or come out of the city centre".

MARTIN ROSS

JORGE SILVA/REUTERS/POPPER

BLOOD AND TEARS: Weeping statue of the Virgin in Caracas

Marian apparitions

Eucharistic miracles are on the increase

In a report last year, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the erstwhile Holy Inquisition) noted a steady increase in reports of "presumed Marian apparitions, messages, stigmata, sweating statues of the Blessed Virgin or Jesus Christ, eucharistic 'miracles' of various kinds, etc." The 25-year-old guidelines on how clergy should deal with such religious wonders are to be updated to give greater doctrinal clarity, especially in places where lay groups have rallied round the phenomena in defiance of bishops. The Roman Catholic hierarchy is distinctly wary of contemporary 'miracles'. *Universe, 9 Feb 2003.*

Reports of BVM images on windows and walls in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan have triggered a minor tourism miracle for six remote villages, three of which are accessible only by air. The images appeared to glow at night, and were captured on video. The phenomena began in Isle-a-la-Crosse on 9 September 2002, when an image of the BVM was seen on the side of a backyard greenhouse and a strong smell of roses was reported. The latest images appeared on two homes in Beauval on 6 January. By March, 10,000 people had travelled to see the images. *Calgary Herald, 13 Sept 2002; [R] 10 Jan; Universe, 2 Mar 2003.*

Thousands of people flocked to a small church in the village of Musetesti, west Romania, after two men said they had seen the BVM 'crying' in a painting. An Orthodox delegation arrived to investigate the claims made by the two unnamed workers, who first witnessed the miracle on 2 January. Aurel Chiana, the local parish priest, said the tears had been seen for four consecutive days after that. He told local media: "It is a sign from God, but I cannot say if it's a good or bad sign." The claims came just weeks after reports of tears coming from a BVM statue in a church in Giurgiu, southern Romania. *Ananova, 6 Jan 2003.*

The hierarchy is distinctly wary of miracles

On various occasions in September 2001, a wooden BVM statue in Cotogchoa, Ecuador, cried "tears of blood" – or, at any rate, red liquid. The first manifestation was a few days before the terrorist attacks in the US, and it was said that the Holy Mother knew of the tragedy in advance and was showing compassion for the victims. Hundreds of pilgrims were attracted to the church and a woman who prayed to the statue claimed to have been instantly cured of chronic pain in her legs. *Owain Johnson in Caracas, 25 Sept 2001.*

A BVM statue in San Cayetano church, eastern Caracas, Venezuela, began to exude aromatic oil in early December 2002, four days after gunmen attacked a rally held by the political opposition, killing three people. One of the dead was Keyla Guerra, who had been baptised in the church. Father José Coromoto, the parish priest, said that a wheelchair-bound elderly woman had walked home unassisted after praying before the statue. Appropriately enough, given the parlous state of the Venezuelan economy, San Cayetano (or St Cajetan) is the patron saint of the unemployed. *Tablet, 15 Feb 2003.*

Two years ago, Archbishop Augustin Misago of Gikongoro in Rwanda released a statement indicating his "definitive judgement" that the reported apparitions of the BVM in Kibeho, Rwanda, are authentic. What made this particularly notable was that the Vatican made the archbishop's statement public on 29 June 2001, signalling official support for his findings. The Holy See doesn't usually take a stand on the authenticity of such extraordinary events. The BVM first appeared in Kibeho to three young girls in November 1981, speaking to them in their local dialect. As pilgrims flocked to Kibeho, there were many subsequent reports of apparitions, involving dozens of alleged witnesses. *Catholic World Report, Aug/Sept 2001.*

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SIDELINES...

RELIC REQUEST
Historian Paul Cantrell, 60, has written to the Queen asking for the return of saints' body parts seized from Lincoln cathedral on the orders of King Henry VIII and taken to the Tower of London. They include the head of St Hugh, the first saint of Lincoln, a finger of St Catherine, a tooth of St Paul and a bone of St Stephen. "I am doing this on behalf of the residents [of Lincoln] as these are things they could show to their children and grandchildren," said Mr Cantrell. *BBC News, 10 Jan 2003.*

DOUBLES MEET
When two unrelated girls met at Saughton Athletics Club in Edinburgh last summer, they found they had a lot in common. They looked alike, and both were called Eilidh Kerr, born in Edinburgh on 23 November 1992 – one in Eastern General Hospital and the other at Simpsons Maternity. Both sets of parents were aware of the "other" Eilidh, as the two girls spent their first months attending Edinburgh's Royal Hospital for Sick Children, but the girls themselves had no knowledge of each other. *Edinburgh Eve. News, 26 Nov 2002.*

FLYING CRABS?
Live Chinese mitten crabs turning up in Camberley in Surrey, 35 miles (56km) from the sea have been reported to the Natural History Museum. "It's just possible that this area is a new habitat," said an RSPCA spokesman. "But they seem to have leg injuries consistent with a fall and the most likely explanation is they have been dropped by herons." *D.Mirror, 27 Dec 2002.*

DEAD SNAKE BITES
Dennis Carr decapitated a deadly brown snake with a spade in his garden in Queensland, Australia. When he went back to dispose of the severed head, it bit him on the finger and, seconds after staggering indoors, he collapsed in front of his wife. He was saved by her quick action in getting medical help. *London Eve. Standard, 28 Jan 2003.*

DODGY DEGREES
On the website of the Southampton Institute of Higher Education last February: "Both the diploma and the MA are half-taught and half-assed."

AP PHOTO/RICARDO MAZALAN

MAGICAL THINKING: A young Mayi-Mayi militia leader; cannibalism forms part of the Mayi-Mayi's magical belief system.

A taste for human flesh

Pygmies eaten in Congo atrocities and other cannibal tales

UN OFFICIALS ARE INVESTIGATING systematic cannibalism, rape, torture and killing in Ituri province, north-east Congo, where fighting displaced about 150,000 people in December alone. Ituri's forest-dwelling pygmy tribes are caught between pro-government forces and Ugandan-backed rebels, including the MLC (Movement for the Liberation of the Congo) of Jean-Pierre Bemba, who hopes to become Congo's deputy president under the terms of a recent peace accord. The rebels routinely enslave the pygmies to forage for forest food and prospect for minerals. Hunters returning empty-handed are killed and eaten. One pygmy, Amzati Njogi, described how he returned from a hunt to observe rebels cooking and eating several members of his family.

Bantu villagers are also targeted. The MLC called their terror campaign "Operation Clean the Slate," said Patricia Tome, spokeswoman for the UN Congo mission based in Kinshasa. "The operation was presented to the people almost like a vaccination campaign, envisioning the looting of each home and the rape of each woman," she said. "They cut out the hearts and other organs of their victims and forced families to eat them. One little girl was executed, cut into little pieces and then eaten." As word of the allegations emerged, Bemba arrested 19 members of his militia, including his chief of operations in Ituri, Lt. Col. Freddy Ngalimo. They went before an MLC court martial in Gbadolite on 18 February, but the government denounced the tribunal as a masquerade designed to allow the guilty to escape.

One little girl was executed, cut into pieces and then eaten

"We hear reports of [enemy] commanders feeding on sexual organs of pygmies, apparently believing this would give them strength," said Sudi Alimasi, an official of a pro-government group. "We also have reports of pygmies being forced to feed on the cooked remains of their colleagues." Much of the vast forested area is controlled by the Mayi-Mayi, a loose grouping of tribal militias united by their magical beliefs and taste for human flesh. *Guardian, 9+16 Jan; BBC News, 14 Jan; [AP] 15 Jan; Sun, 23 Jan; [R] 19 Feb 2003.*

⊙ A newspaper in Ecuador claimed that some of the country's chefs use human thighbones to add flavour to their dishes. Newspaper Extra sparked a scandal by interviewing restaurateurs who admit to cooking with bones

taken from cemeteries. Carlos Acosta said he had cooked with femurs for 40 years and many of his colleagues did the same. He recommended leaving a femur in a soup or stew for half an hour; then "just before serving it, it's good to put the bone back in briefly to give it a final touch." *Dallas Morning News, 1 Jan 2003.*

⊙ A Texan was jailed for 30 years in January for beating his 79-year-old mother to death and eating part of her heart. Joey Cala, 41, had pleaded guilty to the 2001 murder of Lydia Cala, a retired teacher and church volunteer, in the house they shared in Fort Worth. Police found Cala in his mother's bedroom, standing naked over her corpse, covered in blood and nibbling on her heart. "It appeared he was having a conversation with someone, but no-one else was in the house," said a policeman. Cala said he worshipped the devil and the police had interrupted his sacrifice. *BBC News, Ananova, 9 Jan 2003.*

⊙ Indonesian police arrested a man called Sumanto at his house 250 miles (402km) south of Jakarta. He had allegedly dug up his elderly neighbour a day after she had died, taken her corpse home on his bike and eaten parts of her body. Some of these bits were found arranged on a dinner plate. Sumanto had allegedly confessed to frying flesh from the woman's legs and giving about 10 slices to his father, telling him it was goat meat. He believed that eating the flesh would give him supernatural powers. Police also found two sets of dried male genitals. *Ananova, 16 Jan 2003.*

⊙ A Nigerian man confessed to killing his boss and making pepper soup with her body. Salifu Ojo, 23, a farm labourer in south-east Ondo state, killed Christiana Elijah, a 40-year-old mother of four, after a dispute over his pay. He chopped off her head, hands and legs, then removed her internal organs, which he used as ingredients for his soup. He later admitted the soup made him vomit. *[R] 20 Feb 2002.*

⊙ A married couple, the wife's brother and their friend were arrested in Zhytomir, west of Kiev in the Ukraine, suspected of murdering and possibly eating six people in black magic rituals. The four, aged between 21 and 53, lured an 18-year-old girl into a forest outside the town on 26 June 2002. They killed her with two knife-thrusts to the heart and boiled her decapitated head. They made mincemeat out of her heart, liver, kidneys and flesh, and then ate it, feeding some to a four-year-old child. They were arrested several days later while waiting to meet the girl's parents from whom they had demanded a ransom. The couple were suspected of another five murders. Several "black magic books" were found in the friend's flat. *Irish Times, 16 July; Guardian, Western Mail, 17 July 2002.*

His father's skin

PA PHOTOS/AAP

Carl Whittaker, 31, a miner from Mackey, North Queensland, has preserved his father's memory by removing and framing the dead man's tattoos. Barry Whittaker had the tattoos done when he was terminally ill with a view to having them saved after his death. He put his wishes in his will, and before he died of cancer in 1999 his son found a taxidermist in Mackay willing to remove the tattoos and a company in Brisbane willing to tan them. The four tattoos, including a big image of an eagle entangled with a snake from Barry's back, hang in Carl's dining room. "I thought it was a bit on the wild side myself," he said, "but that's what he wanted, and I had a lot of respect for the man, so I did it... He wasn't just my old man, he was my best mate." He hopes to pass the memorial on to his daughter, who is now 15 months old. *[AAP] West Australian, 18 Jan 2003.*

Eric Vinten, 43, is turning his body into a work of art with symbols of good and evil tattooed all over him. Designs of the Grim Reaper and menacing skulls will contrast with princesses, fairies and mermaids in a 'body tapestry' costing £1,000 and taking 15 months. The father of three from East Sussex is spending two hours a week under the needle. He plans to have his skin removed when he dies. "It would be a waste to take such beautiful art to my grave," he said, "so it may as well be auctioned to provide for my children." He hopes it will fetch at least £20,000. *Metro, 25 July 2002.*

SIDELINES...

EXPLODING ARTICHOKE
An Italian woman was peeling an artichoke when it gave off sparks, then a small flame, and then blew up in her hands. Police rushed to her home near Trieste, fearing that it was the work of a terrorist who for 10 years has been planting explosive devices in food products and supermarkets in northern Italy. However, forensic tests showed no trace of explosives, leading police to conclude that it was a natural phenomenon. *Ananova, 26 Feb 2003.*

MARTIN ROSS

HEAD HUNTER
Police in Siliguri, West Bengal, arrested a man carrying 100 human skulls in a bag. Sangey (or Sangha) Lama, 25, collected the skulls from funeral pyres in Bihar and planned to sell them to Buddhist monks in Sikkim for use in religious ceremonies. It must have been a big bag! *[AP] 31 Jan; TNT, 3 Feb 2003.*

BLACK DEATH PRANK
Dr Thomas Butler, head of infectious diseases at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, sparked a major bio-terrorism alert on 14 January when he told officials that 30 phials of bubonic plague bacteria were missing. President Bush was briefed amid fears that the bacteria could be converted to weapons grade. Butler was arrested the next day when it was discovered that the phials had been destroyed. It was not explained why he had lied. *Metro, 17 Jan 2003.*

BEAN HAD
A shop assistant in Edinburgh was duped into letting a man cover her feet with food including baked beans and allowing him to photograph his work. The man claimed to be raising money for Comic Relief. *D.Telegraph, 8 Mar 2003.*

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ufology

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE present their regular survey of the latest fads and flaps from the world of flying saucery.

Classics and cover-ups

SCRAMBLE: On 13 August 1956, De Havilland Venoms were scrambled to intercept a mystery radar target

GEOFFREY LEE/WWW.RAF.MOD.UK

Classic 'radar-visual' case online

The Internet has often been criticised for dumbing down ufology. Publishing in-depth research in the traditional manner is expensive and doesn't grab the headlines. As a result, UFO magazines have lost readership as newcomers turn to the web for more easily accessible, but often poor-quality, ufology.

To redress this, American ufologist Kevin Randle has published a major online investigation to "methodically and dispassionately review some of the classic [UFO] cases." His contribution is a detailed treatment of the 1948 Thomas Mantell case, in which the pilot died whilst pursuing a 'flying saucer'. Kevin has used contemporary USAF documents and interviews with eye-witnesses to build a chronological account of the tragedy. The case file is interactive, allowing investigators to add their own comments to the peer-review process. Kevin's paper can be found at: **www/virtuallystrange.net/ufo/ufoupdates/listers/mantell.html**

In the UK, a group of experienced ufologists are also publishing their own re-investigation of a classic radar-visual case from 1956. The Lakenheath-Bentwaters event was one of the 30 cases classified as 'unidentified' by the 1969 Colorado University UFO study commissioned by the USAF. Since then, the case has been picked apart in UFO books and magazines, many of which based their accounts on inaccurate information. Since 1996, much new information has been discovered relating to the RAF's role in the events. This has allowed the UK team to completely overhaul the history of the case, with surprising results both for believers and sceptics.

The new site will showcase all the evidence, including US and UK documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, interviews with pilots and military personnel, alongside commentary from experts. The file – running to several hundred pages – will be unique in the history of ufology. A taster can be found at: **www.parcellular.fsnet.co.uk/Lakenheath.htm**

UFO programme 'panic' gripped MOD

The annual release of British government files at the Public Record Office never ceases to throw up ufological morsels. This year, Ministry of Defence papers from 1972 included a file which illustrates their ongoing dilemma over public statements on UFOs.

In 1971, the BBC's current affairs programme *Man Alive* televised a panel debate on UFOs in response to a wave of sightings around RAF bases in Oxfordshire. When the producer asked the MOD to field a spokesman for the debate, the Powers That Be faced a PR nightmare. By refusing to comment, they encouraged those who believed in a cover-up; but by admitting interest, they risked giving the impression UFOs officially existed.

They decided "on balance, it would be better to face up to [..] a hostile audience of cranks and fanatics rather than the [..] risk of leaving the field to the fanatics and giving the impression that we are afraid to stand up to questions."

The Man from the Ministry who drew the short straw was RAF pilot Anthony Davis, then head of the Air Staff department S4, responsible for UFOs. Davis put in a successful performance in front of the cameras, explaining the MOD's position eloquently. His appearance made history as the first televised interview with a senior MOD expert on UFOs – 20 years before Nick Pope! *BBC News Online, 6 March 2003.*

UFO cover-up in Top Five conspiracy beliefs

Belief that the Government is "suppressing evidence of aliens from outer space" is alive and well, according to a survey of conspiracy theories presented to the British Psychological Society's annual conference.

Psychologist Dr Patrick Lehman, of Royal Holloway College, London, tested how much weight 64 volunteers gave to a set of six theories, scoring them from zero to 150 based upon how likely they believed them to be true. The top score (95 out of 150) was for the theory that "the Government is deliberately covering up toxins in food." This was followed by the JFK plot (86), the EU plan to take over Britain (60) and the murder of Princess Diana (57).

Although the UFO cover-up ranked only 49 (5th), it was seen as more likely than AIDS having been created in the laboratory (at 38). Lehman pointed out that to achieve these scores, significant numbers of people taking part in the experiment must have given them credence. "People are becoming more likely to believe these conspiracy theories and I think it has got to be down to people feeling increasingly divorced from institutions of power," he said. "Once people start to believe in a conspiracy theory, they can more easily dismiss the arguments of those who disagree with them by simply saying they too are part of the conspiracy."

Dr Lehman added: "I was surprised, really, that anyone believed the Government was covering up the existence of aliens." Obviously the learned doctor isn't a subscriber to *Flying Saucer Review*! *Daily Mail, 14 Mar 2003.*

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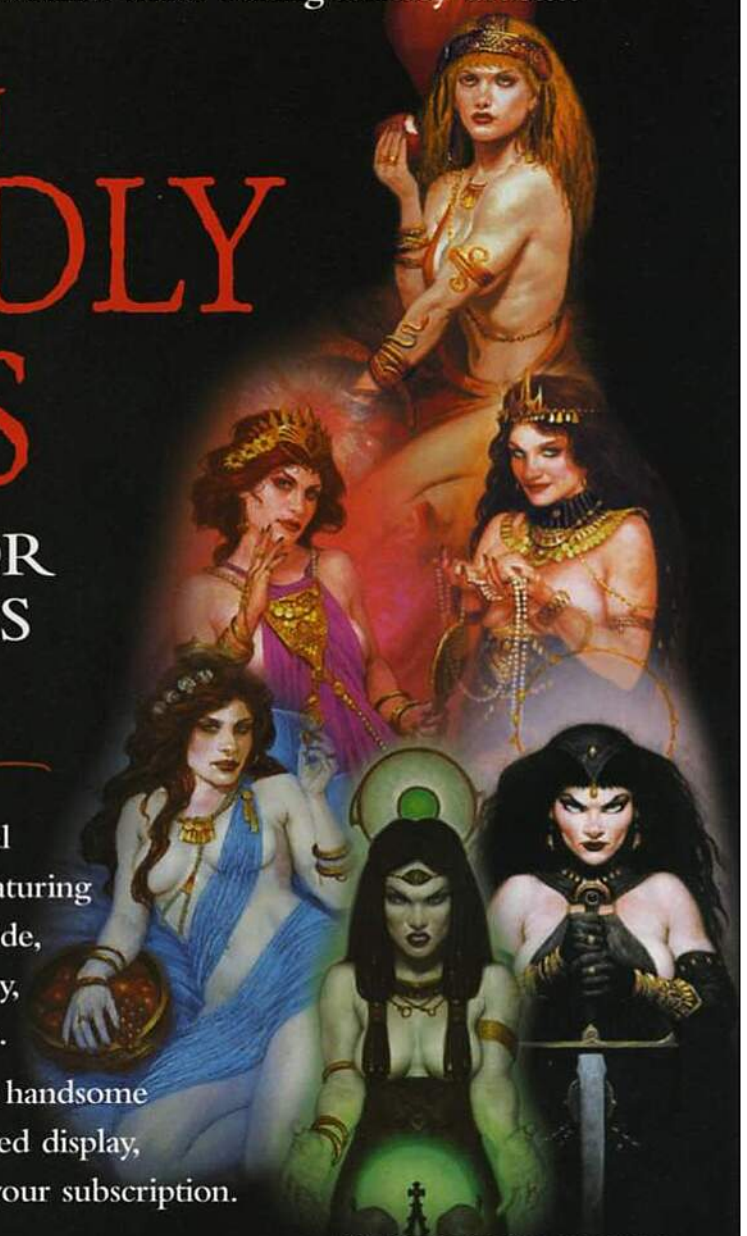

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FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD
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39. IRISH BULL

"The rocks of Clare, Ireland, are marked with prints supposed to have been made by a mythical cow" – Fort, *Books*, p215 (35 Index references to Ireland, apropos various typical forteana).

According to Strabo (*Geography*, bk2 ch5 para8, bk4 ch5 para4), Ireland was "a place where completely wild people live a wretched existence on account of the cold. Its inhabitants are more savage than the Britons, being both cannibals and gluttons. They also consider it honourable to eat their dead fathers, and have open intercourse with their mothers and sisters."

Another geographer, Pomponius Mela (*De Chorographia*, bk3 ch53), calls the Irish "completely unrefined, the world's most ignorant people, totally lacking all the virtues."

Elsewhere (bk2 ch78), Mela adds a fortean touch, explaining the Irish site Lapideum's (= A Place of Stone) name as the result of "a battle there being settled by a rain of stones. Believe what you like, there *are* many stones scattered there."

Pliny, though, briefly includes Ireland in a list of British isles without any details, fortean or otherwise (*Natural History*, bk4 ch16 para103).

Later ancient writers wax ever more colourful, e.g. Solinus (*Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium*, bk22 chs2-6, a semi-fortean primer): "Its inhabitants' savage customs make Ireland inhuman. They are unfriendly and warlike. When the blood of killers has been drained, they smear it on their own faces. To them, right and wrong are the same thing. Ireland has no snakes and few birds; there have never been any bees there."

No snakes? So much for St Patrick's ophidian miracle! Still, unless imported later, Solinus was wrong about bees, as shown by old Irish laws on apiculture in the *Bechbretha* (ed. C Edwardes & F Kelly, Dublin Inst. for Advanced Studies, 1983). Compare the yarns of John Evelyn's *Diary*, 3 Dec 1661: "The Duke of Ormond told me there were no moles in Ireland, nor any rats 'til of late, and that but in one county; but a mistake that spiders would not live there; only not poison; also that they frequently took salmon with dogs."

St Jerome is – typically – the most colourful (*Against Jovinian*, ch2 para7; *Letters*, no69 para415): "On meeting herds of pigs and cattle, they cut off the buttocks of the shepherds and their wives, and their nipples, regarding these alone as delicacies. They do not have individual wives, but as each desires, they indulge themselves like beasts."

(Irish definition of foreplay: Brace Yourself, Bridget! – Larry Wilde, *The Last Official Irish Jokebook*, Bantam, NY, 1983)

Philip Freeman (*Ireland & the Classical World* (Univ. Texas Press, Austin, 2001, p99) explains the anthropophagy, "What Jerome witnessed was some rough-and-ready Roman soldiers having fun with a gullible youth over a meal of mutton stew."

In the Prologue to his *Commentary on Jeremiah*, Jerome inveighs against the heretic Pelagius as "a most stupid man stuffed with Celtic porridge, lashing out like an Alpine dog, doing Satan's work for him, an Irishman." The Christian hymnographer Prudentius (*Apotheosis*, v216) likewise brands an enemy "worse than a war hound, a half-wild Irishman."

No wonder the *Orphic Argonautica* (vv1165-8) lamented, "Wretched and grievous misery will be my lot if I come near the shores of Ireland."

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SURREAL: That eye-watering moment from *Un Chien Andalou*.

The fine art of torture

SPANISH ART HISTORIAN JOSE Milicua has uncovered what is alleged to be the first use of modern art as a deliberate form of torture. In the Barcelona jails constructed by the CNT (Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores, the anarcho-syndicalist trades union) during the Spanish Civil War, new ways were devised of making prisoners crack up and spill their secrets. Bauhaus artists were said to have inspired a series of secret cells built in 1938 under the direction of a 37-year-old Frenchman of Austrian parentage called Alfonso Laurencic, a double agent posing as a CNT supporter. He swindled both sides in the war, making huge amounts of money by smuggling people out of the Republican zone. Milicua's information came from an account by RL Chacon of Laurencic's trial before a Francoist military tribunal in 1939.

Laurencic so-called "coloured cells" were hidden from foreign journalists who visited the makeshift jails on Vallmajor and Saragossa streets. His "psychotechnic" torture techniques were allegedly inspired by ideas of geometric abstraction and surrealism and by avant garde art theories on the psychological impact of colours, developed in the Bauhaus era by Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Johannes Itten. Laurencic's proposals were basic: red had a stimulating effect while blue was relaxing. Green produced melancholy and sadness, which was why this was used for the glass in the cell windows.

The cells were approximately 6ft 6in (2m) high, 5ft (1.5m) wide and 6ft 6in long. Covered with tar inside and out, they became unbearably hot during the day. Those held inside could never rest. The plank that served as a bed was at a 20-degree angle, making it impossible to sleep without falling to the floor. If the prisoner tried to walk around, he would stumble over bricks and other objects scattered on the floor. The only option left to prisoners was staring at the walls, which were covered with optical illusions, cubes, coloured circles and spirals. Lighting effects gave the impression that the dizzying patterns were moving. The intention, according to Chacon, was to "tear the victim's nerves to shreds".

Laurencic told the military court that he had been commissioned to build the cells by a prominent anarchist who had heard of similar ones used elsewhere in the republican zone during the civil war, possibly in Valencia. Also, according to the prosecutors, a jail in Murcia in south-east Spain forced prisoners to view the infamously disturbing scene from Dali and Bunuel's 1929 surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou*, in which an eyeball is sliced open. The Spanish newspaper *El Pais* commented: "The creators of such revolutionary and liberating [artistic] languages could never have imagined that they would be so intrinsically linked to repression."

A word of caution here: Chacon was hardly a disinterested observer. As a supporter of Franco, he was an enemy of so-called "degenerative art", including the output of the Bauhaus and the surrealists.

Observer, 26 Jan; Int. Herald Tribune, 3 Feb 2003.

The Hierophant

IN HIS FORTRESS OF ARROGANCE, DEEP BELOW THE HIMALAYAS, THE IMMORTAL ASCENDED MASTER KNOWN AS THE HIEROPHANT TRAVELS THE MORE DISREPUTABLE PATHS OF FORTEANA...

Several correspondents have been in touch with regard to a quite remarkable website at http://www.wiolawapress.com. We all know that photo enhancement and the uncanny can make for uneasy bedfellows (remember the 'face' on Mars?) but this really does take things to an extraordinary extreme. Not only has the site's creator proved BEYOND THE SHADOW OF A DOUBT that our leaders are evil reptilian space alien extraterrestrial aliens, by applying Photoshop effects until they look like ALIEN REPTILE CYBORGS, but they can also demonstrate that at least two astronauts escaped this year's shuttle disaster alive.

Given that the site is possibly the most bizarre and impenetrable I have ever seen, I'm rather hard pressed to explain exactly how it all fits together; the synopsis on the front page does it better than I ever could:

"THE GALACTIC ORION/SIRIAN/DRACONIAN FEDERATION OF REPTILES HAVE BEEN IN CONTROL OF EARTH FOR EONS... USING THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF GENESIS SCIENCE TO INSTALL SHAPESHIFTING LIZARD HYBRIDS AS THE RULERS ON EARTH... ONE OF THEIR MEMBERS,thousands of years ago, WHO WAS A GENESIS SCIENTIST NAMED EA (where the name EA_RTH originated) WANTED MORE CONSCIOUSNESS for HIS CREATIONS, which meant EVENTUAL FREEDOM FROM LIZARD-SNAKE-DRAGON CONTROL AND ABUSE.... THE DNA CAME AS A GIFT FROM THE BIRD TRIBES OF THE OWL... known as one of the WIZEST and MOST INTELLIGENT OF ALL THE ANIMALS... THE REPTILES ARE DESPERATELY TRYING TO REMAIN IN CONTROL, AND SYNTHESIZE A NEW HUMAN

REPTILIAN MAN, CALLED THE 'HRUMACHIS MAN' WITH ADVANCED OWL-HU-MAN DNA AND ABILITIES... INORDER TO CONTINUE THEIR CONTROL ON EARTH AND THEIR KINGDUMB..."

The Unpleasantness in the Gulf was, needless to say, just the latest instalment in the long snake-owl conflict (or as the site puts it, "THE BIGGEST UGLIEST FISH GET AWAY WITH IT! 3,3,3 **REMEMBER KIDDIES AL QAEDA MEANS CHILDREN OF EA.. WHO GAVE HU_MANITY THE OWL DNA>> THE SNAKES HATED HIM!. HE WENT AGAINST THE EMPIRE!**").

Mars, for what it's worth, is full of pterodactyls. Much, much more (including some startling photos of "the REAL KING KONG") at the site.

Meanwhile, something styling itself the Federal UFO Working Group has been in regular touch; well, I say "in regular touch" but I mean "sending me large and identical e-mails every eight days or so", with the result that I'm going to give them some publicity in the hope that they'll sod off. What are they hawking? "The True Story of a project so brilliantly conceived and so flawlessly carried out that mankind never had an inkling of its existence until the revelations at Roswell, Bian Kara and the Antarctic rendered any other possibility moot..." (anybody out there with the slightest clue as to what in blue hell the "revelations at Bian Kara and the Antarctic" were is encouraged to get in touch). The usual bollocks, in other words, with a large side-order of even more of the usual bollocks. "In the Halls of Power, what Thing could be known to the policy-makers and yet be so dangerous that it is never spoken of?" they ask; I suspect that the answer isn't "George W Bush's cocaine habit and drunk driving conviction".

There's a sprinkling of nonsense about rods, time travel ("It has been done only with single atomic particles... but what if the universe could be "fooled" into thinking that a ship posessed the attributes of the right kind of atomic particle?") and much more. Sadly, there's no web address for them, beyond a link to PayPal where you can, if you so desire, sign over $12 for 12 no doubt fascinating reports, but a web search for "Federal UFO Working Group" should turn up a copy or two of their mailout...

If you have a lead on any paranormal gossip, share it with the Hierophant... hierophant@ifgmags.com

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF *LOBSTER*, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER

In the past, conspiracy theories worth investigating often began with tangible anomalies in the received version. For example, the gun with which Lee Harvey Oswald was supposed to have shot Kennedy and Governor Connally was a dirt-cheap, notoriously unreliable model with inaccurate sights. When they tested it, the FBI's best marksmen couldn't make the necessary shots – even when they adjusted the sights. By contrast, many of today's Internet conspiracy theorists need nothing in the way of evidence before they conclude: "it's a conspiracy!" The loss of the NASA space shuttle on 1 February was no exception. In the days after the event, a shoal of 'theories' circulated, none of which were backed up by anything so solid as 'evidence'. The shuttle, argued the 'theorists', was brought down by:

A Pilot error but "this is being covered up";

B A computer 'worm' (a kind of virus) acquired via the shuttle's Internet connection. (One version tells us the virus came from China.)

C A beam of energy from either the HAARP (High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program) aerials in Alaska or a "scalar Tesla Howitzer weapon", whatever that is. It was done by the United States as a "textbook psychological warfare operation" to unify the American population (www.infowars.com) or as "a distraction in the global press during the final weeks of war preparation in the gulf".

D Combining the Chinese theme, HAARP and Al-Qa'eda, Marshall Smith (www.brojon.org) claims the shuttle was downed by a member of Al-Qa'eda working on the HAARP transmitter and acting for the Chinese.

Meanwhile, back at 9/11, certainly the most fertile source of conspiracy theories in my lifetime, on 4 March The Konformist (www.konformist.com/) distributed a piece about Professor AK Dewdney, a Canadian mathematician, computer scientist and emeritus professor at the University of Western Ontario. Dewdney thinks the planes were flown from the ground, by remote control, and wanted to test the feasibility of claims that cell-phone calls were made from them. Dewdney hired a light plane to test phones and found that if cell-phone calls did originate from the hi-jacked airplanes, they must all have occurred at very low altitude – which doesn't fit the official story. Is this the anomaly that will blow the case wide open?

Probably not, for on the same day, 4 March, the British media (for instance The Guardian) carried a report from an Al-Jazeera TV journalist stating that an Al-Qa'eda military chief had told him that the organisation had, indeed, been responsible for the plane-bombing of America. Will the 9-11 theorists who think the Americans did it themselves now fall silent?

ALEX TOMLINSON

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science

This month DAVID HAMBLING takes a look at a cornucopia of man-made objects plummetting from the heavens above

This junkyard Earth...

"Who you jiving with that cosmic debris?" Frank Zappa once asked; in fact, objects fall from our crowded skies on a regular basis

Strange things falling from the sky are a fortean staple. Meteorite finds date back millennia – *The Epic of Gilgamesh* refers to "stones from the sky" – but they were not accepted by the scientific establishment until 1794. In the 20th century something new started falling from the heavens: space debris.

A satellite with an altitude above a few hundred kilometres is up there for good, but one in a lower orbit will brush the upper edges of the atmosphere and will gradually slow down. This is known as a decaying orbit, and ends in a fiery demise – although some fragments may survive re-entry. Identifying space debris should be simple, as there are a limited number of launches and they should all be from known sources. However, this turns out not to be the case. Although many objects are deliberately "de-orbited" in a controlled manner and come down, others turn up randomly out of the blue. For example, the upper stages of rocket boosters may make it into low orbit, only to come down unpredictably some months or years later.

The Center For Orbital and Re-entry Data Studies (CORDS) has a database of large debris recoveries (www.aero.org/cords/index.html). Of the 50 or so large chunks of debris listed – things like pressure vessels 2ft (60cm) across, rocket nozzles and fuel tanks 9ft (2.7m) long – a surprising number have not been positively identified. Comments like "believed to be of Soviet Origin" abound; sadly, none are "believed to be of alien origin". If the Russians have created mysteries through their secrecy, the US has added its own share. On 26 May 1964, some unusual shooting stars were seen over Venezuela; shortly afterwards a local farmer found a disc made of golden metal. CIA agents appeared, saying they were looking for fragments from a NASA scientific satellite called Discoverer.

Why would the CIA be interested in a NASA programme? In fact, Discoverer was a cover story for the top secret Corona spy satellite. The technology of the day did not allow good quality images to be broadcast, so Corona took pictures with a film camera and ejected the canister of film, known as a bucket, down from orbit. The bucket was supposed to be retrieved in mid-air by a specially equipped aircraft, but this did not always work out. In addition to one found in Venezuela, another golden bucket of spy snaps ended up in Norway and was never found. The programme was not declassified until 1995.

METEOR ROAD: The Kecksburg object

The object was said to be acorn-shaped with hieroglyphic markings on it

Other finds can be equally baffling. In 2002, Australian scientists tested a hypersonic craft called HyShot that came down somewhere in the outback. A major search was mounted to find HyShot and recover the instrumentation. A ground team was sent in to investigate when something was spotted from the air. "We found something all right. It was pretty well identical to our rocket, same colour but the nose cone was bigger," Dr Alan Paull said. His team were unable to discover what the mystery rocket was. "I don't know whether we should put an ad in the paper." Given that the rocket was found in the Woomera Prohibited Area used by Australian defence forces, it seems likely that the rocket was part of some earlier missile programme, but nobody knows for sure.

Unidentified falling objects are linked to the flying saucer mythos. On 9 December 1965, witnesses claim that something fell out of the sky and landed in the woods near the Pennsylvania town of Kecksburg. One witness, Bill Bulebush, describes seeing something "acorn-shaped", 7-10ft (2-3m) long, apparently with hieroglyphic markings on it. He recounts that a military team chased away witnesses. James Romansky said he saw the mysterious object being driven away on a flatbed truck under a tarpaulin.

A life-size replica of the object is displayed outside Kecksburg's fire station. Some have remarked that it resembles the Russian Kosmos 96 probe, which US Space Command believed to have crashed somewhere in Canada 14 hours earlier. Other locals dispute Bulebush and Romansky's account, and many doubt that anything ever came down near what is now named Meteor Road. Romansky's past record, including convictions for theft and armed robbery, has not helped.

If you can positively identify a piece of space debris, it can be a lucrative find. A pressurised sphere from a Soviet Foton 1 spacecraft that fell in Australia was expected to fetch over AU$30,000 at auction. But be careful. The US has had at least three accidents with space vehicles containing nuclear material, including a plutonium-powered navigation satellite that crashed into the Indian Ocean.

The Soviet record is even worse, having spread radioactive satellite waste over Canada in 1978. Not all of these re-entering hazards have been accounted for. In 1996 a Russian Mars probe with half a pound of plutonium on board came down somewhere in the Atacama Desert of Chile and Bolivia. It has yet to be found. The finder had better watch out; there is enough radioactive material in there for a dozen dirty bombs.

So, if you find what looks like a Roswell crash site in your back garden, take plenty of pictures. But it might be wise not to get too close without a Geiger counter.

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Oddities and ends

Vanishing statues and hitchhikers, and a bit of SHC

STATUE SPIRITED AWAY

Lightning struck Castle Dracula in Bran, central Romania, in early February and plunged it into darkness. When the lights came back on, staff noticed that the statue of a mystery nobleman, made of marble and volcanic stone, which had stood in an alcove since the 13th century, was missing. Local legend claimed the castle was owned by Vlad the Impaler, who ruled Wallachia in the 15th century.

Danut Sindrilau, chief investigator with the Bran police, said: "It is a mystery as the gates were locked and the walls, which are 28ft (8.5m) thick, have no windows." Despite superstitious speculation, he believed that the disappearance had more to do with the statue's estimated value of £750,000 than the supernatural. "The thief knew what he was doing," he said. "The manner in which the room was broken into remains a mystery to us. The hall was pretty well secured with padlocks, which have shown no signs of being forced open. Evil forces or not, we have alerted border guards and officers across the country to be on the alert for any signs of the statue." *Ananova, 11 Feb 2003.*

SPECTRAL PASSENGER

A variant of the "phantom hitchhiker" legend apparently played out for real on New Year's Eve. Cab driver Arju Miah, 52, picked up a young woman outside the Sanctuary night-club in Denbigh, North Wales, at about 3.45am. As she wanted to go over 150 miles (240km) – to Great Barford, near Bedford – he asked for the fare up front and she paid him in crisp £20 notes. He called into a petrol station for more fuel. "She was a nice girl," he said. "She had pink hair and was wearing a short black skirt and a white shirt. She was friendly and spoke to me quite a lot. She told me she had gone to the club with friends in a limousine, but had decided to go home alone because she was tired and her friends wanted to carry on partying."

When Mr Miah got to the outskirts of Bedford, he noticed that the girl was no longer sitting on the seat behind him. He turned around, thinking that perhaps she had fallen asleep and fallen into the footwell, but there was no sign of her. "I can't understand what happened," he said. "One minute she was there, the next she was gone. But the door never opened and I know she didn't get out. She literally just vanished. I don't know who she was. She was nothing but a ghost. I can think of no other explanation. Now I think back, her hand was very cold when she gave me the money. She told me it was because she had been waiting in the cold, but she hadn't been waiting that long. Other people in cabs saw here get in as well. There's just no explanation." Mr Miah, who works for Fab Cabs of Cosgrove, near Milton Keynes, Bedfordshire, sought the opinion of his priest, who sounds like a phlegmatic sort. He told Mr Miah that the incident was "quite normal". *Milton Keynes Citizen, 23 Jan 2003.*

SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION?

On 17 December 2002, a charred corpse was found lying on the kitchen floor of a flat in Helsingborg, Sweden. The body was burnt beyond recognition, but it was presumed to be that of the sole occupant, a 79-year-old woman. According to police investigator Håkan Lund, the fire was limited to the spot where the body was found. The police, avoiding talk of spontaneous human combustion, speculated that the woman had been wearing artificial fabric, which had ignited when she learnt over the cooker's electric hotplates. Fire engineer Hans Svensson invoked the famous wick hypothesis: "It is likely that the subcutaneous fat served as fuel to the fire," he said. "It would require a very high temperature for this to happen, which could have been reached if the synthetic clothes melted on her body." As there were no witnesses, no firm conclusion could be reached. *Expressen (Sweden), 18 Dec 2002.*

The body of Alexei Rusnac, 85, from Dej in western Romania, was found by his daughter next to his fireplace. According to the police, his head was burnt to the size of an orange, while his body and clothes were unmarked, suggesting SHC. Several doctors said it was possible that he had been poisoned by carbon monoxide, then fell into the fireplace and set his head on fire; but police forensic experts disagreed and refused to issue a death certificate without a known cause of death. Mr Rusnac was buried in his back garden. *Ananova, 5 Feb 2003.*

A RARE CA

VAL FLETCHER, 40, LANDED THE world's rarest fish, two stones heavier than herself, while fishing for mackerel with her partner Robert Herrings (sic!) off a pebble beach near her home in Skinningrove, near Saltburn, Cleveland, on 17 February 2003.

NORTH NEWS AND PICTURES

Ms Fletcher (pictured above at far right), who is 5ft 4in (1.6m) and weighs 112lb (50kg), took 40 minutes to land the 11ft 7in (3.5m), 140lb (63kg) oarfish with a standard rod and squid as bait. She is thought to be the first person to have caught an oarfish with a rod and line. "It was a real struggle to get it in," she said, "and then when we did nobody knew what it was – it looked prehistoric. We tied it to a scaffold plank and it was outside my house for two days while people came to have a look at it."

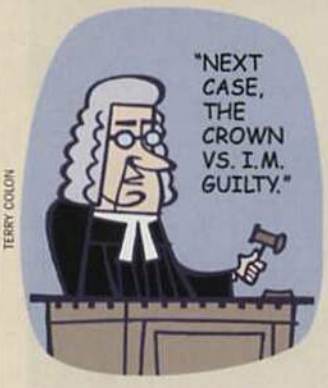
Oarfish (*Regalecus glesne* or "king of herrings"), the ancient mariners' legendary "sea serpent", are the longest bony fish in the sea and sport a mane-like crest behind a toothless mouth. They can grow up to 30ft (9m) long, weigh up to a quarter of a ton (254kg), and are believed to swim vertically. Biologists have no idea what the deep water creature, which usually live 3,000ft (914m) down in the Atlantic, Pacific, or Indian Oceans, was doing in the relatively shallow North Sea. The last one seen in the UK was found in 1981 on a beach at Whitby, North Yorkshire. Scientists hoping to examine the fish were disappointed as it had been sliced up and put in Ms Fletcher's freezer.

BBC News, D.Telegraph, Ananova, Sun, 21 Feb 2003.

10 OF THE BEST

What's in a name?

10 cases of nominative determinism



TERRY COLON

⊙ A Bristol man, caught with £17,000 worth of cannabis, convinced a jury it was for personal use. The man and his partner chain-smoked joints to relieve paranoia, agoraphobia, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and light sensitivity. His name was Christopher Blow. *D.Mirror, 23 Nov 2002.*

⊙ A 37-year-old man who falsely claimed he had been robbed to get a free lift from police was fined £80. He retracted his story after police offered to study CCTV footage of the "incident". The man lived in Lye, West Midlands. *D.Telegraph, 20 Aug 2002.*

⊙ A man and his lover sneaked into a barn in Appleby Manor, Leicestershire, made love, and went to sleep leaving a candle burning. The candle set fire to hay, causing £24,000 worth of damage. The man was Michael Hazzard, 23. *D.Star, 21 Dec 2002.*

⊙ On 22 January, the great grandson of cosmetic mogul Max Factor was found guilty of 86 charges. He drugged women with the date-rape drug GHB and filmed himself raping his unconscious victims at his beach house. He faced a life sentence, but had not been seen since he jumped bail three weeks earlier. His name? Andrew Luster. *London Eve. Standard, 22 Jan 2003.*

AND SOME CLASSICS

⊙ A young Italian girl, Giovanna d'Arco (Joan of Arc) was sitting beside a fire in Caserta, near Naples, in 1978 when a spark leapt from the hearth and ignited her clothes, burning her to death.

⊙ An Indian called Stanley Joseph Stillsmoking was indicted in Texas in February 1979 for the attempted theft of cigarettes.

⊙ In September 1981, motorist Alexander Dent crashed into motorcyclist Terry Clout at Newbury, Berkshire. Neither was badly hurt.

⊙ In 1984, a magistrate congratulated Miss Lillian Sloman, 91, of Worthing, for having a 70-year clean driving record – then banned her for obstructing police by driving too slowly.

⊙ The examining attorney in the April 1984 extradition hearing in New York of Joseph Docherty, who had escaped from the Crumlin Road prison in Belfast, was Ms Ira H Bloch.

⊙ Nicholas Forletta, 24, from Torquay, was fined £200 in April 1986 for swearing at police.

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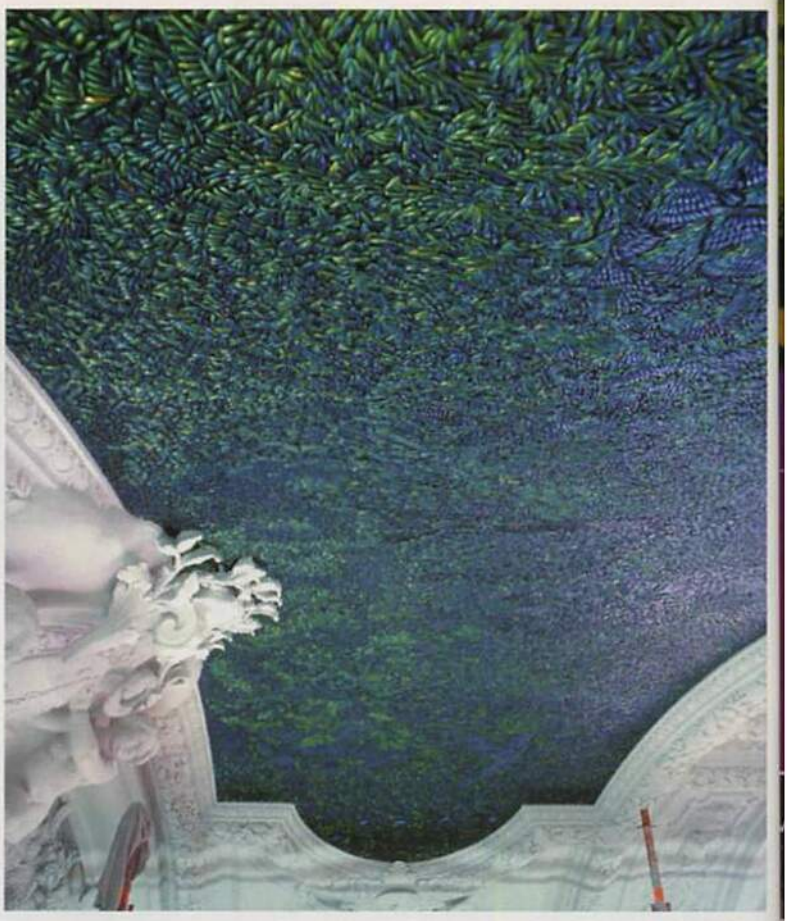

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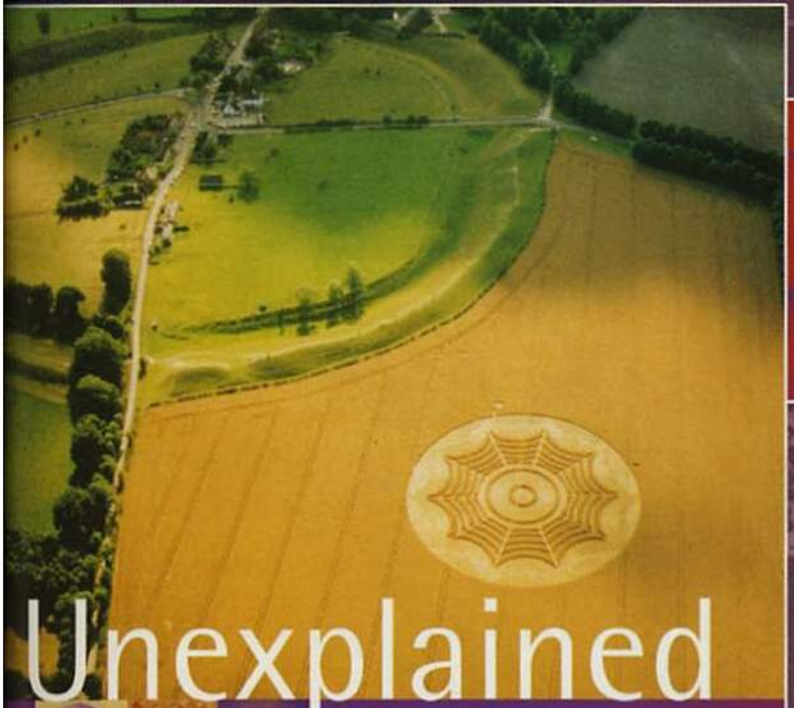
Belgium's beetle art

THE HALL OF MIRRORS IN BELGIUM'S 19TH CENTURY ROYAL PALACE has been transformed by the controversial Flemish artist Jan Fabre, whose 30 assistants spent four months gluing 1,600,000 iridescent Asian jewel beetles to the barrel-vaulted ceiling. It is the first new permanent artistic addition to the Brussels place since Rodin produced some *bas-reliefs* over a century ago. Fabre, 44, equally at ease with video art, stage design and choreography, was commissioned by the Italian-born wife of King Albert, Queen Paola, who wanted to brighten up the predominantly grey structure. For a centrepiece he has made the beetle fragments crawl down to cover every inch of the main chandelier, which now looks like a giant, rather unsettling insect itself.

The beetles were collected by the entomology departments of universities, researchers in the fields, and above all a network of people picking them up from restaurant kitchens in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand where the creatures are regarded as a delicacy. Fabre has named the work 'Heaven of Delight' in homage to Hieronymus Bosch's 'Garden of Earthly Delights'. The beetles are not glued randomly: birds' wings, giraffes' legs and salamanders' eyes can all be discerned in the design.

"The effect is startling," writes Marlise Simons. "Laid out in multiple patterns, the carapaces have turned the once classic and formal hall into an enchanted space, vibrating with colours and shapes that change with the movement of each viewer. Depending on the angle of the light, the myriad wing cases gleam in fluorescent green or turn blue and shift again to emerald green, then to ochre or to a deep, velvet moss colour. From some vantage points the carapaces seem as soft as feathers; from other spots they resemble a daunting layer of scales."

Fabre is convinced the ceiling will last for centuries. "The wing cases of the jewel beetles are made of chitin, one of the hardest, most imperishable materials we know," he said. "Oil paint fades; the carapace will keep its original colours." *Guardian, 11 Nov 2002; Int. Herald Tribune, 8-9 Feb 2003.*



Unexplained *Phenomena*

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archæology

NEIL MORTIMER on a Stonehenge tourist, the earliest human footprints, old caribou poo and an ancient Slovenian wheel

Prehistoric pilgrim bones

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More details about the 'Amesbury Archer' [see **FT163:22**] have been revealed by post-excavation analysis. Tests carried out on oxygen isotopes in the man's teeth suggest that the Archer came from an Alpine region, probably the Swiss Alps, around 2,300 BC, during the long period of Stonehenge's construction. He was buried a short distance from the grave of a younger man, who, according to tests, probably came from the Bristol Channel region. The two men shared a rare genetic trait, but one which was probably unknown to them. Bones at the top of the instep that are usually unarticulated were found to be articulated in both men, suggesting that there was a family link between them.

The proximity to Stonehenge of the two incredibly rich graves, as well as the discovery that the archer probably travelled a considerable distance to get to Stonehenge, have led to suggestions that the monument may have been the focus of a European tribal elite and that the Amesbury Archer may have been a prehistoric pilgrim. Whatever the outcome of these latest findings, it is clear that the influence of Stonehenge in antiquity extended far beyond the bounds of central southern England. *New Scientist, 11 Feb; Current Archæology, Feb 2003.*

The Devil walks out

Italian researchers may have identified the earliest known footprints of our early human Homo ancestors, fossilised in ash deposited by an eruption which radiometric techniques have dated to between 385,000 and 325,000 years old. Three tracks of footprints were examined by a team led by Paolo Mietto, of Padua University, on the Roccamonfina volcano south of Cassino in southern Italy. The footprints are known locally as 'devils' trails', and are considered to be of supernatural origin in local folklore.

One track comprises 27 footprints; another, 19; and a third, 10. They are about 8in (20cm) long and 4in (10cm) wide, suggesting that the people who made the footprints were only about 4ft 5in (1.36m) tall, perhaps indicating that they were made by juveniles. Researchers are working on the assumption that the footprints are those of *Homo heidelbergensis*, the probable precursor to Neanderthals and *Homo sapiens* who is thought to have evolved more than 600,000 years ago. *www.newscientist.com, 12 Mar; D.Telegraph, 13 Mar 2003.*

Big job

Biologist Gerry Uzuk was hiking in the wilderness of the Yukon, Canada, when he caught the distinct smell of caribou dung wafting through the air. Mr Uzuk was puzzled because there hadn't been any caribou reported in the area for nearly a century. "It was like being in the Twilight Zone", said Rick Farnell, a colleague of Mr Uzuk's, who later helped investigate the mystery pong. "You could see them from a distance – big, black bands of fæces. I'm talking tons of it". A heap of prime caribou dung stood 8ft (2.4m) high and ran for 1,640ft (500m). Laboratory analysis discovered that the dung, the product of innumerable ancient migrating caribou herds, had been frozen in a glacier for thousands of years, and only recently exposed as the glacier retreated. Along with the mighty turds, researchers discovered a wealth of prehistoric human artefacts, including stone darts, arrows and spearheads. *Charlotte (NC) Observer, 17 Jan 2003.*

Wheely old

Slovenian archæologists are claiming that an ancient wheel *(axle pictured right)*, found in a prehistoric marsh settlement near the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana, is the oldest wheel in the world. 'Experts' are reported to have estimated that the 55in (140cm) diameter ash and oak wheel, 2in (5cm) thick, is between 5,100 and 5,350 years old. Dr Anton Veluscek, from the Archæological Institute at the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences, said: "The wheel is surprisingly technologically advanced – much more so than the later models found in Switzerland and Germany". However, "general consensus" places the invention of the wheel in Mesopotamia, at least 15,000 years ago. *Ananova, 25 Feb; Discovery News, 10 Mar 2003.*

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Special Report

In the days of the comet

As the world prepared for the invasion of Iraq, a small group of skywatchers were reading the signs of an apocalypse of far grander proportions. MARK PILKINGTON unravels the tale of a doom that never came.

The comet captured between 17:32:01 UT - 18:17:56 UT on 31 Jan, 2003

On 18 February this year, the NASA/European Space Agency satellite Soho produced remarkable images of a comet passing by the Sun, only to be blasted by the vast eruption of a gaseous Coronal Mass Ejection (CME) several million miles long, the first time such an event has been witnessed by humankind. For most observers, this was a spectacular display of grand cosmic forces at work; but for some, it was a sign of something far more terrible.

Other than its relative proximity to the Sun (9 million miles – approx 14 million km – not very far in astronomical terms), what made this comet, designated NEAT (C/2002 V1), unusual was that it had only been discovered on 6 November 2002. Picked up by NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratories' Near Earth Asteroid Tracking (NEAT) programme, the comet was expected to brighten as it approached the Sun, reflecting our star's light as layers of ice melted away, but to remain invisible to the naked eye.

But NEAT proved to be no ordinary comet, and in December it began to brighten far more quickly than had been expected, so fast that some observers thought we might be looking at another Hale Bopp – a comet visible in broad daylight. NEAT had other plans, however, and by mid-January it began to dim, though it remained visible through binoculars in the constellation Pisces.

Around this time, astronomers worked out a new orbit for the comet, a highly elliptical route that saw it swing by our Sun every 37,000 years or so. Along with the comet Hyakutake, identified in 1996, NEAT was also revealed to have two tails, an ion tail as well as the usual dust tail. This was, in the words of noted comet expert John Bortle, "a bit of an oddball".

While astronomers marvelled at NEAT's cosmic eccentricities, other groups were beginning to notice the comet, which had seemingly appeared out of nowhere.

The warning signs began on 14 February. Several respected UK newspapers, including *The Times* and *The Independent*, reported a speech made at a conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Geoffrey Sommer of the Rand Corporation (a think tank with close links to NASA, the US military and the government) suggested that in the face of an inevitable "extinction-type Impact" by an asteroid or some other interplanetary object, "ignorance for the populace is bliss. If you can't do anything about a warning, then there is no point in issuing a warning at all." A NASA consultant, David Morrison, interviewed by a journalist, added cryptically: "There are, however, many things out there that we know nothing about."

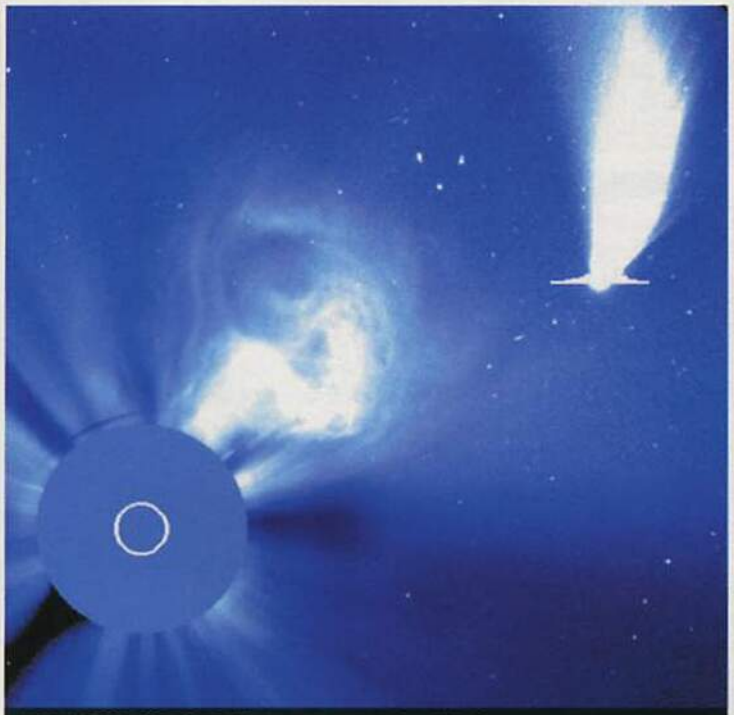
Four days later, NASA had released its images of NEAT's solar fly-by and Sommer's word made chilling sense. Was his statement even a coded warning: was the Earth facing an imminent cometary impact?

Doomwatchers and amateur astronomers on several Internet bulletin boards smelled trouble. Before 18 February, NASA had seemed confident that NEAT would pass by the Sun and head back into deep space on its 37,000-year voyage, and that would be the end of it. However, at 06.54 Universal Time (GMT), the massive coronal tongue flicked out towards the comet, watched in real time by thousands of amazed observers. Suddenly, the images stopped appearing on the SOHO site – the transmission, it seemed, was dead. Had the collision of the CME and NEAT caused some sort of vast energy wave that had knocked SOHO out of action? Was it heading to Earth? Or, more sinisterly, had NASA themselves pulled the plug?

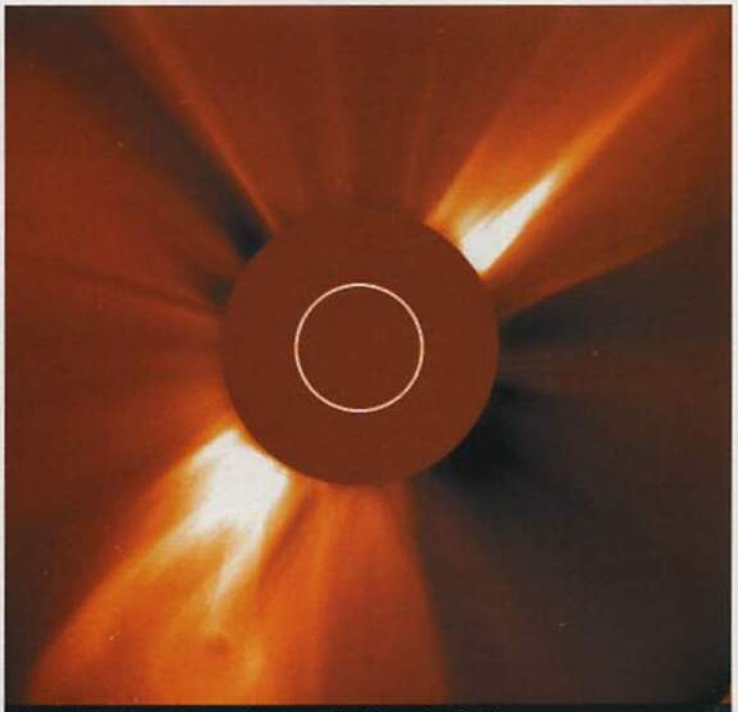
Seven hours later, SOHO was back online, but something was wrong. The next time stamp was 07.54 UT, an hour after the famed CME shot. At 8.54, the comet was still clearly visible, along with something else – what looked strikingly like a solitary staring eye, right next to NEAT. This was interpreted in three ways: as an anomaly; as a glitch deliberately inserted by NASA technicians at Goddard Flight Center to show up NASA's tampering with NEAT imagery; or, thirdly, as a Sign from someone, or something, else: was this the eye of God?

Further evidence of apparent tampering was visible on the image dated 09.54. The comet was still in place, while the tongue of blue fire had vanished, having presumably subsided in the intervening time. But below NEAT was what appeared to be a crudely-pasted portion of a comet image: another glitch; or another slip-up by NASA staff? Compounding the suspicions of the SOHO watchers, an image time-stamped 13.54 showed the comet in the exact same position as the 09.54 glitch. What was going on?

There were to be more suspect images, but the final piece of visual evidence cited by the NEAT watchers appeared at 19.31 on 22 February, and showed the Sun expelling what looked like a solid object from its core, a solid object which some interpreted as the head of comet NEAT itself. Had comet NEAT fragmented on impact with the Sun? Was the Earth about to be showered with millions of tonnes of cosmic débris? Was this the terrible truth that NASA was trying to hide?



18 Feb 2003, 05.54 UT: The comet approaches the Sun.



22 Feb 2003, 19.31: An object expelled from the Sun?

Would the US go to war if it knew the World was about to end?

It's estimated that the magnetic energy released by a CME takes two to four days to reach the Earth, where it can wreak havoc on telecommunications, navigation and power systems. It can also affect the Earth's weather patterns. The days following NEAT's fly-by (and possible obliteration) certainly saw some unusual activity back home, including heavy snow storms in the Middle East and earthquakes in Alaska and China.

Further fuelling the fears of looming disaster was the 19 February announcement by America's Chief of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, that Americans should be prepared to stock up with three days' worth of food and emergency supplies. And then there were the prophecies.

Veronica Lueken, known as "Veronica of the Cross" was, for a time, America's best-known Catholic visionary. Between 1970 and her death in 1995, Veronica was visited regularly in two churches in New York state by the Blessed Virgin Mary, who would impart words of prophetic wisdom. One of these messages, received in 1973, was said to read as follows:

"I see this large ball, it's heading very fast, with its long tail behind it which is giving off gases. It's very big, and it's very long, and way off in the distance... now the ball is making a dive into the path of the Earth... The ball is going around the Earth, and the tail now is starting to drift over onto the Earth. I see now the oceans, the waters. I see the waters churning up, and this land is just going down into the water."

And, of course, no mention of prophecy would be complete without Nostradamus. Quatrain 62 of Century 2 reads:

Mabus plus tost alors mourra,
viendra,
De gens & bestes vn horrible defaite:
Puis tout à coup la vengeance on verra,
Cent, main, faim quand courra la comete.

(Mabus then will soon die, there will come
A horrible undoing of people and animals:
At once vengeance one will see vengeance,
One hundred hands, thirst, famine, when the comet will run.)

Mabus has been variously identified over the years, as a Carthaginian god of Hannibal, as the assassin of a Zoroastrian priest who usurped the Persian throne in 522 BC, as Yasser Arafat, George Bush, but most people say that his true name is revealed only when written backwards. Mabus is Subam... Saddam Hussein! These, then, were truly the last days.

Was NEAT the comet of prophecy? Or were we witnessing the return of Planet X, the fabled 10th planet, or Nibiru, the 12th planet of the Sumerians, as documented in the copious works of Zechariah Stitchin?

There were, however, several serious problems with the reports circulating around the web.

One key item concerned the estimated size of NEAT. Doomwatchers quoted the comet's head as being 384,000 miles (618,000km) in diameter – almost half the width of the Sun itself and four times that of Jupiter. In fact, its actual rock core was only about 6 miles (10 km) across, though the ice, rock and gas cloud surrounding it may have been up to 62,000 miles (100,000 km) across – pretty average for a comet.

More problematic were the statements attributed to Geoffrey Sommer. Sommer claimed that he had presented his comments about keeping a cosmic catastrophe secret as just one of the options available to government bodies at the time of crisis, yet he was quoted as if this was a policy recommendation. His words had been twisted entirely out of context.

NASA, meanwhile, claimed that bad weather had resulted in a Code Red alert at the Goddard Space Flight Center, in Washington DC, where the SOHO images are processed. This simply meant that SOHO's staff hadn't gone to work, hence the failure to release the updated NEAT images. "Nobody manipulated any data," said SOHO's Bernhard Fleck.

So, a near miss or a cosmic storm in a teacup? At the time of writing, late March, we're still here and the sun is shining. Would America bother going to war if it knew the world was to end imminently?

The conspiracists and doomwatchers were just doing what they do best and what we love them for: that is, creatively interpreting data and events to build an alternative – usually alarming – model of reality.

Like Comet NEAT at the heart of it all, their longed-for apocalypse will come round again. And the doomwatchers will be waiting.

Sources: Yahoo.com news, 18 Sept 2002; Independent, 15 Feb, BBC News Online, 18 Feb; Space.com, 28 Feb 2003; www.exopolitics.org/Comet Neat.htm

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alien zoo

DR KARL SHUKER on mystery sirenians, a new genus of spider, something nasty which has been chomping on colts, and the delicious Iranian Míshmurgh bird

Red Sea seal mystery

There are a number of mystifying historical records on file of an alleged but unidentified species of seal formerly inhabiting the tropical waters of the western Indian Ocean and Red Sea. Attempts have been made to classify this *inconnu* species variously as a monk seal, an OOP southern elephant seal *(pictured above)*, and even a dugong. Now, a new account of this abiding mystery has appeared, authored by François Moutou of the French Mammal Society, who has offered up two additional pieces of hitherto-unconsidered historical data for discussion. One is the discovery of two authentic 3,000 – 4,700-year-old sites of dugong butchery in the United Arab Emirate of Umm al Qiwain, thereby adding weight to the dugong identity.

Conversely, the other concerns the sighting of 20 or so "sea cows" lying asleep on a beach on Mamelles islet in the Seychelles by a Marion-Dufresne expedition on 4 October 1768. For although 'sea cow' normally alludes to dugongs, these and other sirenians do not come ashore to lie on beaches, whereas seals commonly do. Thus, the riddle of the Indian Ocean cryptid remains unsolved. *Monachus Guardian, vol. 5, Nov 2002; www.monachus-guardian.org/mguard10/1032scien.htm*

Diversity alive and well

During late 2002, an international team of scientists led by Boston University zoologist Dr Christopher Schneider announced that their recent survey of rainforests in Sri Lanka had uncovered as many as 140 new species of tree frog, ranging in size from an inch or so to four inches (10cm), and exhibiting a veritable rainbow of colours. Bearing in mind the worrying decline of amphibians worldwide in recent years, this discovery is all the more surprising, and welcome.

Queensland's new spider, the sole member of a new genus

Nor is such unveiled diversity limited to Sri Lanka, or frogs. While completing a survey of invertebrates in January 2002 on Queensland's North Stradbroke Island, scientists unfurled 34 species of spider new to science, including one species so novel that it required the creation of a new genus. This latter species (which will be formally dubbed *Pseudoanyphaena michaelrixi*) is also the first member of its subfamily to be discovered anywhere in Australia. Indeed, its nearest relatives comprise a genus from Chile! *Independent, 11 Oct 2002; http://redland.yourguide.com.au/detail.asp?class=news&subclass=local&category=general%20news&story_id=216596&m=1&y=2003 20 Mar 2003.*

Colt-killer on the loose

For at least two years, eyewitnesses in the rainforested area of Arroyo Salado, in northern Argentina's Salta province, have reported seeing a bipedal manbeast-like entity, standing 6.5ft (2m) tall, covered in black fur, sporting very large eyes and ears, armed with sharp powerful claws on its hands, emitting ear-splitting howls, and allegedly responsible for killing and devouring a number of fairly large animals, as well as scaring or even occasionally attacking humans who have encountered it. However, this daunting entity finally became headline news in mid-February 2003, following the discovery of a killed colt's chewed skeleton, surrounded by large bigfoot-type prints. Veterinarian Luis Calderon confirmed that the colt's bones had been gnawed by something with extremely powerful jaws and sharp teeth, and plastercasts were made of the prints by Jose Exequiel Alvarez, head of the Juan Carlos Rivas Archæological and Palæontological Group. The mystery beast is now the subject of an official enquiry by the Thirty-first Sheriff's Office, at Rosário de la Frontera, led by Rene Humberto Tacacho. *El Tribuno, 21 Feb 2003.*

Míshmurgh is a mish mash

While serving in the Indian army, ADH Bivar visited the guest rooms of the Wali of Swat at Saidu Sharif in the North-West Frontier Province, whose foyer contained two stuffed birds, one of which was unfamiliar. Sporting red foreparts and grey posterior plumage, it was labelled as a tragopan (squat, short-tailed pheasant), but unlike all known tragopans it exhibited a lyre-shaped tail. It was distinct from the western tragopan, the only species native to this region.

Bivar then alluded to a now-vanished Iranian bird called the míshmurgh, whose flesh made particularly tasty eating. Could this be one and the same as the stuffed bird that he had spied? Palæontologist Darren Naish wondered whether the latter specimen might conceivably have been a taxiderm composite, noting that the only lyre-tailed galliform bird in this whole area is the Caucasian black grouse, whose remaining plumage is very different from Bivar's bird, but Bivar dismissed that possibility. So if this curious specimen still exists, it may well be worth a detailed examination by an ornithologist versed in pheasant taxonomy. *Darren Naish, pers. comm., 26 Feb 2003.*

Worth Reading

TALK
OF THE TOWN

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A letter from the Editor...

David Sutton
Editor, Fortean Times

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medical bag

PAUL SIEVEKING presents a round-up of medical anomalies from his bulging postbag. This month: foreign objects

The hole in the head gang

The long-term effects of a bullet through the head – or a twig in the lung or a pin in the brain – can be fairly unpredictable

A Taiwanese man who suffered from a severe cough for many years was cured when a sewing needle was removed from his back. Chiou Ming-hwang, a Taipei physician, spotted the needle after doing a chest X-ray on the patient, who wasn't identified. It was lodged so deep in his back that it almost pricked his lungs and was irritating them. He couldn't recall ever feeling the needle sticking him in the back, but his wife remembered losing one a few years ago on the couple's bed. *Ananova, 30 Jan 2003.*

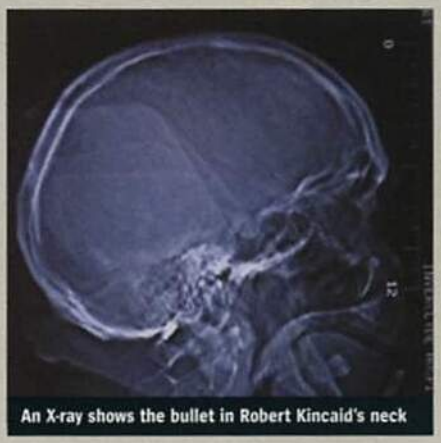
SOUTH WEST NEWS SERVICE/DAVID BEBBER

Chris Brown coughed up an inch-long leylandii twig that was stuck in his lung for 20 years

Doctors in China extracted a rusty pin which had been embedded in a woman's brain for 40 years. The operation on Zhang Meihua, 41, was performed in Jinan, in coastal Shangdong province. Zhang, who had no memory of being stuck in the head with a pin, had begun to experience restricted movement in her arms and legs about 20 years earlier. All treatment failed, until doctors in No 148 Military Hospital did a cranial CAT scan and found the pin. They estimated it had been in her head for about 40 years, based on the growth rate of her skull. ***[AP] 30 Oct 1994.***

Chris Brown, 34, of Blockley, Gloucestershire, coughed up a twig which had been stuck in his lung for 20 years. He had swallowed the inch-long stick of leylandii during a "tussle with pals" in his parents' garden in 1983, and it lodged in his lung. He started wheezing and spluttering, but the twig failed to show up on X-rays or scans. He had breathing difficulties and chest pains and regularly coughed up blood. On 24 February 2003, he awoke coughing in the night. He banged himself on the chest and the twig popped out. *Sun, 25 Feb 2003.*

After Bill Weston, 80, from Worcester, suffered a blackout and minor stroke, a hospital scan revealed a piece of shrapnel that had been embedded in his head for 58 years. He recalled that a mortar had exploded beside him in 1944 while he was fighting with the 8th Army in Italy. "Something hit me on the left hand side of my head and blood was streaming down my face," he said. "I thought it had skimmed off because the main injury was to my leg." *Sun, 27 Dec 2002.*



PRESS TEAM

An X-ray shows the bullet in Robert Kincaid's neck

Sometimes, foreign bodies in the head can be expelled spontaneously. Joe DeMarco was shot in the head when he waded ashore in Normandy in 1944. On 18 April 1993, the 67-year-old ex-GI was watching TV in North Carolina when he coughed, cleared his throat, and spat out the bullet. *D.Record, D.Mirror, 19 April 1993.*

Sub-Lieutenant Mike Tetley was shot in the face and blinded for life fighting Mau Mau guerrillas in Kenya in 1954. The dum-dum bullet exploded on impact and the fragments lodged behind his right eye. In March 1993, he was awoken by a nasty taste in his mouth. "I spat it into my hand and found about 19 pieces of lead the size of pin heads. I couldn't see them but I could feel them. It seems nature finally took its course," he said. ***D.Mirror, Times, 2 Mar 1993.***

Kolio Botev, 77, from the Bulgarian village of Dimitrievo, is claiming a world record after living for 60 years with a bullet lodged behind his right ear, ever since he accidentally shot himself in 1942. The current record, according to Guinness, is held by a Japanese man who had a bullet stuck in his left eye for 58 years until its removal in 2001. Mr Botev has refused repeated offers from doctors to have the bullet removed for fear the operation would kill him – even though he can no longer close his right eye properly and often hears noises in his head. *Ananova, 7 Nov 2002.*

Robert Kincaid, however, may hold the record. A conscript in the 7th battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, Corporal Kincaid was knocked unconscious when an ammunition truck blew up during the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940. He believes he was shot by German troops stalking the battlefield to finish off the wounded. As there were two holes in the back of his neck, he assumed that a bullet had passed right through him. He was taken to a convent hospital and later went on the run with the aid of the Resistance. He was eventually captured in Holland and was a POW in Bavaria until the war ended.
This year, the 83-year-old widower, from Gourock, Renfrewshire, was referred to Inverclyde Royal Hospital after a fall, and an X-ray showed a bullet still embedded in his neck after 63 years. "I have never had any trouble because of it," he said, "and I'm quite content not to have it removed now." ***Mail on Sunday, 16 Feb; Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette, 17 Feb 2003.***

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

59. CAT YEARS

HUNT EMERSON

The myth

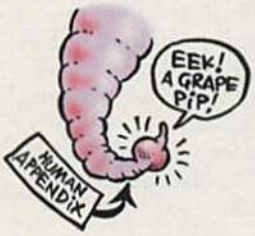
One year in the life of a cat (or dog, or sometimes horse) is equivalent, in terms of lifespan, to seven human years.

The "truth"

So, if your ginger tom is 12 years old, that means he is at the same level of senescence as an 84-year-old human. In which case, how come he can still leap from the floor to the kitchen counter without apparent effort? Can your granddad do that – with or without his teeth in? Any Well Known Fact which contains the number seven tends to set the Myth-sense tingling, and the idea that the ageing process can be compared so precisely across species, despite numerous variables, is rejected by all authorities. A widely accepted approximate formula for comparing cats with humans suggests that kittens mature much faster than babies, with the rate of feline ageing slowing down significantly after two years. Therefore, for instance, a one-year-old cat might be roughly 16 in human years, while a four-year-old could be compared to a man of 32.

Sources *In praise of older cats* by Sarah Hartwell (Cats Protection League, 1996); *You and your cat* by David Taylor (Dorling Kindersley, 1986); "How old is a cat in human years?" by Dan Christian, at www.thedailycat.com

Disclaimer Expert opinion varies considerably on this matter; there is no universally agreed feline to human ageing ratio.



HUNT EMERSON

Mythchaser

Don't swallow grape pips, we were told as children – they'll give you appendicitis. Assuming this belief does not accord with latest medical findings, can anyone suggest how it might have originated – and does it apply to other fruit as well?

SEAN HERNON PICTURES

SLASHED: Collette Hegarty with Cameo, the victim of an attack in August 2002.

Animals attacked

Horse mutilations and other bloody rites

A series of attacks on horses across Britain increased significantly in the last three months of 2002. Welfare experts warned horse owners to examine their animals for signs of hair being cut or plaited, blood samples being taken or any indications of stress or sexual assault. The attacks took place in Scotland, Wales, East Anglia and Nottinghamshire. In an attack on two ponies at Laurencekirk near Aberdeen on 14 October, the animals had their tails hacked off.

During late October and November, six horses in rural Nottinghamshire – in Flintham, Aslockton and Thoroton – had snips taken from their manes and tails, which had been 'plaited' with a sticky substance. None of the reports seen by *FT* give any specific dates, locations or names of witnesses for the following assertions, but small stone cairns were allegedly found in the fields where some of the attacks took place, the stones covered in burnt horse hair and candles. Apparent black magic symbols, including pentagrams and double-headed axes, were discovered drawn or carved nearby.

There was a smaller outbreak in Nottinghamshire in 2001, beginning in the run-up to Hallowe'en. Those attacks petered out by Easter and the National Equine Welfare Council speculated that the incidents might be related to significant dates in the occult calendar. Andy Norfolk, a spokesman for the Pagan Federation, emphasised that mainstream pagan groups held life sacred and would not sanction attacks on animals.

While the last major wave of horse mutilation peaked in 1993 (see

FT64:18, 66:12, 68:47, 94:22-28), there has been a steady but little publicised series of attacks ever since. On 1 May 2002, a tethered stallion was savagely mutilated with a broken bottle in Middlesbrough, Cleveland, and had to be put down, while last summer there were several knife attacks on Shetland ponies at a riding school near Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire. However, the occult symbolism is, by and large, a new element in this gruesome tradition. *Horse & Hound, 2 May, 17+25 July; Aberdeen Press & Journal, 28 Oct; Observer, 10 Nov; Nottingham Eve. Post, 27 Nov 2002.*

In the closing months of 2001, there were several stories of animal sacrifice apparently connected with the black arts. Staff at Durham Wildlife Trust nature reserve made a grisly discovery in an isolated copse at Rainton Meadows, Houghton-le-Spring, Tyne & Wear, on 8 November. A mute swan had been decapitated and crucified on an elder tree after being killed with a crossbow. As this was close to Hallowe'en, some kind of pagan ritual was suspected.

The heads of dogs, cows and geese and a dog's body were found in Mackay, Queensland, in October. Further south, in Rockhampton, stone circles were found in which birds had apparently been sacrificed.

An agent of the Tarragona animal protection agency in north-eastern Spain found 15 dogs with their front paws sawn off on 3 November. Some had died and the rest were put to sleep.

In mid-December, police in Madrid found "possessed individuals" performing rites with dissected eagles, goats and entrails after people complained about the noise from a disused abattoir in a suburb of the Spanish capital. Those taking part escaped by clambering out through the roof, leaving the officers to examine blood-spattered walls on which was written "Satan will conquer" and in various places the number 6.

There was a suspicion that they had used bottles of diseased sliced pig, jars of animal remains and chemicals that were left in cupboards at the abattoir when it closed two years earlier. *Gold Coast Bulletin (Australia), 11 Oct; Irish Times, 5 Nov; Northern Echo, 10 Nov; D.Telegraph, 17 Dec 2001.*

Strange deaths

A COLLECTION OF KILLINGS TRIGGERED BY TRIVIA

FILIPINO LABOURER RANDY CRUZ killed his neighbour Rogelio Lopez over who had the more famous surname. A witness told police he saw the two men arguing about their surnames as they walked down a Manila street. At the height of the argument, Cruz, 27, repeatedly stabbed Lopez with a knife. *D.Star, 15 Sept 2002.*

A MINNESOTA MAN STABBED AND SHOT his aunt to death after they argued over the flavour of her home-made chilli. Richard Bruestle, 38, of St Paul, was arrested for the murder of Lorene Nell McIntyre, 50. *NY Post, 11 Dec 2002.*

A SPANIARD CONFESSED TO KILLING ANOTHER man for taking a sip of his drink by mistake in a bar. Barcelona prosecutors sought a 12-year jail sentence for Dino Marcelo Miller, 31. *Newcastle Journal, 1 June 2000.*

A MAN SHOT HIS BROTHER DEAD AFTER an argument over a television remote control in Spain's south-west Huelva province. Ignacio Ruiz, 34, used a hunting rifle to blow out the television set before shooting Rafael, 39, in the chest. *Independent, 11 Sept 2002.*

WHEN NORMAN STEPHENSON, 56, criticised his lodger, Michael Holleran, 41, for not lifting the lavatory seat when he urinated, Holleran killed him with a sledgehammer. The attack took place in Wealdstone, north London, in August 1999, and Holleran was jailed for life in March 2000. *Guardian, 25 Mar 2000.*

EUGENE AND PEARLE COGSWELL HAD been happily married for 20 years. In August 2002 she baked a blueberry pie and said she planned to give it to a relative. He threw a glass of wine in her face; she rang the Maine police; he shot her and then killed himself. *Independent on Sunday, 18 Aug 2002.*

ABEL BEAUDOUIN, 69, HANGED HIMSELF after killing two neighbours in Vendôme, France, during an argument over the right to use a path. *Sunday Telegraph, 4 June 2000.*

STEVEN BRASHER, 42, FROM TEXAS, SHOT and killed his long-time friend Willie Lawson, 39, on 5 November 2001 after accusing him of drinking the last beer in his fridge. "There was only two beers left," he said, "so I took one, and I told Willie not to take my last beer." *Newark (NJ) Star Ledger, 6 Dec 2002.*

A PRISONER WAS KILLED AFTER HIS SNORING drove a cellmate into a violent rage. Thomas Brady, 22, was stabbed with a sharpened table knife as he slept in his cell in Dublin's Mountjoy prison on Easter Sunday 2000. He was rushed to hospital but couldn't be saved. *Tanzania Guardian, 26 April 2000.*

TERRY COLON

AFTER AN EVENING'S BAR-HOPPING IN Fort Worth, Texas, a dispute between four men over whether they were going to heaven or hell led to the death of one of them. Clayton Frank Stoker, 21, put a loaded shotgun in his mouth. When Johnny Joslin, 20, tried to take it away, saying, "If you have to shoot somebody, shoot me," the gun went off and fatally wounded Mr Joslin in the chest. Stoker, a Johnson County corrections officer, was subsequently charged with murder. *[R] 30 July; Guardian, 6 Aug 2002.*

AN IRANIAN COUPLE MURDERED THEIR eight-year-old daughter because of her poor grades in school. Abbas Rajabalizadeh and his wife Seyedeh Tahereh Mousavi, said to be drug addicts, were arrested in their home in Lengaroud in the north-eastern province of Gilan. They confessed to forcing their daughter Maedeh to drink a glass of weed-killer in March 2000 because "they wanted to save her from becoming a burden on society", the official IRNA news agency said. They wrapped her body in a blanket and buried it in the yard of an abandoned house. *[AFP] 2 May 2000.*

The twi

Is there a special connection between identical twins? Yes, say the twins. No, say most experts and a good many parapsychologists. Yes, but only under certain very specific conditions, writes GUY LYON PLAYFAIR, who believes he has produced the best evidence to date.

Twin photo: Getty Images/Tim MacPherson. Sky photo: www.arttoday.com. Photo manipulation: Etienne Gilfillan

Is there a special connection between identical twins? Californian supermodels Sia and Shane Barbi certainly think so. "We have that twin thing going on," says Sia. "Wherever we are in the world, we kind of know what the other one's doing."

"That's right," says Shane. "It's instinctive. It's a twin thing."

Such an idea has been around for at least a century and a half. It turns up, for instance, in Dumas' 1844 novel *The Corsican Brothers*, in which the hero explains: "We had to be separated with a scalpel, which means that however far apart we are now we still have one and the same body, so that whatever impression, physical or mental, one of us perceives has its after-effect on the other."

That was 19th century fiction. Fast-forwarding to 21st century fact, we find Hussein Salih telling the *Evening Standard* (6 Feb 2003) how it feels to be one of a pair of conjoined, or 'Siamese', twins who were successfully separated. "If you ask me 'Are you separate people or a unit?' I will say 'Definitely we are a unit. Two in one.'" And yes, they can communicate at a distance. There was the time, for example, when Hussein decided to explore the large hotel in which his family was staying and managed to get his hand stuck in a piece of machinery on another floor. Hassan picked up the pain – "like stabs to the body" – and successfully guided his parents to his brother's rescue.

Back to Dumas: one of the twins was out riding in Corsica with a friend when "Suddenly, I received such a violent blow on my side that I passed out." When he came to, he said he thought he had been shot, pointing to where he felt the pain – although, as his friend noted, there was no hole in his jacket. "In that case," was the

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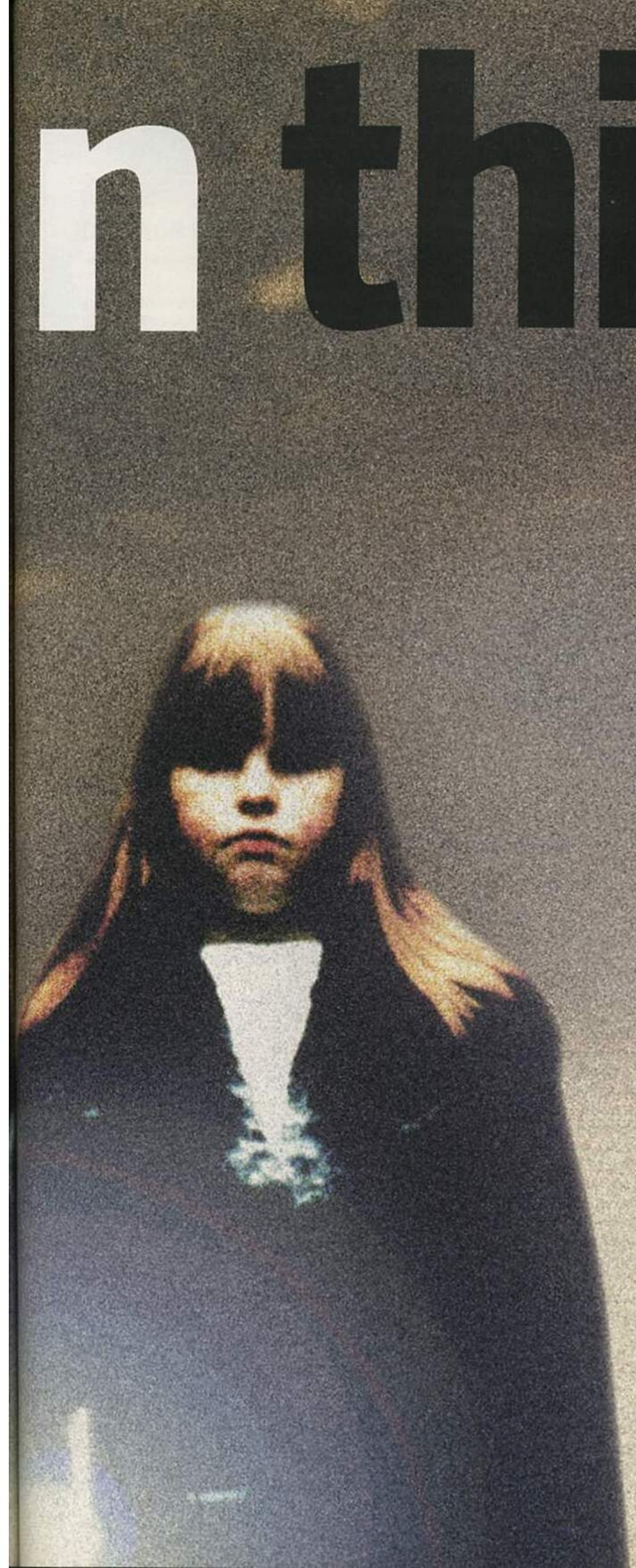


reply, "it's my brother who has just been killed." As indeed it was... in a duel some 600 miles (970km) away.

In 1975, author and editor Norris McWhirter and his son Alasdair were standing in the drawing room of their home when Norris suddenly slumped into a chair, looking dazed. "I was terrified and thought he had suffered a heart attack," Alasdair told me. "A few minutes later he recovered. The phone rang and it was the police." They told him that his twin brother Ross, who lived 6 miles (9.5km) away, had been shot dead on his front doorstep.

Similar accounts have been published, broadcast or given to me personally of how one twin reacted, sometimes quite dramatically, when the other fell downstairs, broke an arm, a leg or a nose, had a painful injection, got stuck in railings, burned a hand with a clothes iron, had a premature baby or committed suicide. Twins not only send and receive messages by telepathy, as do many non-twins, they also transmit physical sensations, almost always painful or unpleasant ones which, with very rare exceptions, non-twins do not. This is what makes the twin connection a special one.

A DAFT QUESTION

However, some twins and several experts think otherwise. Asked for her opinion of telepathy, one twin interviewed in Channel 4's *Cutting Edge* (1997) had this to say: "Oh get real! The possibilities of that are remote, what with all the big scientific stuff. If it was that possible a phenomenon it would have been picked up by now, so why ask this daft question?"

Peter Watson, in his book *Twins* (1981), assures us that "there is no evidence whatsoever to support the idea that any form of parapsychological phenomena are involved in the twin bond." Nor is there, he adds, "the slightest scintilla of a suggestion that twins have some way of communicating with each other that brings on coincidence."

And what of the views of those who do the "big scientific stuff"? A leader in the field of twin studies is Dr Nancy Segal, formerly of the University of Minnesota, where for many years she and her colleagues had twins flown in from all over the world to be examined from head to toenail and asked more than 10,000 questions about everything under the sun... except, as one of their twins has told me, telepathy.

Dr Segal devotes just 10 lines of her 432-page book *Entwined Lives* (1999) to the subject of extrasensory perception (ESP), including the statement: "I do not ➞

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY/SPR

question the occurrence of twins' 'ESP-like' behaviours. I do wonder why some people endorse ESP in the face of more compelling data from twin studies."

Back in the Sixties, one of the first British twin researchers, Dr James Shields, used similar wording, stating rather patronisingly that: "Claims of telepathic-like experiences are so often made, and not only by the hysterically inclined, that one suspects there is more to it than simply the wish to be alike." He did not, however, inquire further into the matter, or consider the possibility that "telepathy-like" experiences might actually be experiences of telepathy.

TELEPATHY AND TABOO

So it seems that twins and the scientists are in head-on collision mode. Why should this be? One reason is that many scientists still equate telepathy with such things as alien abductees, Bigfoot and Nessie, and dump the lot in the bin marked 'Paranormal. Do Not Touch'.

Telepathy is taboo, as I found out when I approached the Twin Unit at St Thomas's Hospital, London, in the hope of getting access to their huge mailing list so that I could send out a questionnaire. I was asked what my research interest was, and gave my well-rehearsed reply, carefully avoiding the 'T' word: "Biological correlates of empathy."

This produced a blank stare. "What's that, then?"

I was cornered. "Oh, you know, what some people call, um, telepathy."

The effect of the word was dramatic. "Oh, we're not interested in spooky stuff." I made my excuses and left, clutching a press release about a ground-breaking survey the unit had just completed on whether both twins of a pair laugh at the same jokes. [1]

There are other reasons for such evident allergy to telepathy research. One is that there is a common belief – not entirely unjustified – that parapsychology (or *psi*) researchers have studied twin telepathy and found there isn't any. Another is that for much of the 20th century, the focus in twin research, in Minnesota and elsewhere, was on those who had been separated at birth and reunited later in life, sometimes much later. Such pairs offer unique opportunities for the study of the relative importance of what Sir Francis Galton, the pioneer of twin research, called nature and nurture, or as we say nowadays, genetics and environment.

They are equally important to the study of thought concordance (such as liking or disliking the same things), which is easy to mistake for telepathy, as is chance coincidence. When, for example, Barbara Herbert and Daphne Goodship were reunited 40 years after their birth and separation and taken to Minnesota, they found at least 30 close similarities in their tastes for food, drink, books and clothes. They even found they each had a mother-in-law called Maud who was born on the same day of the same year.

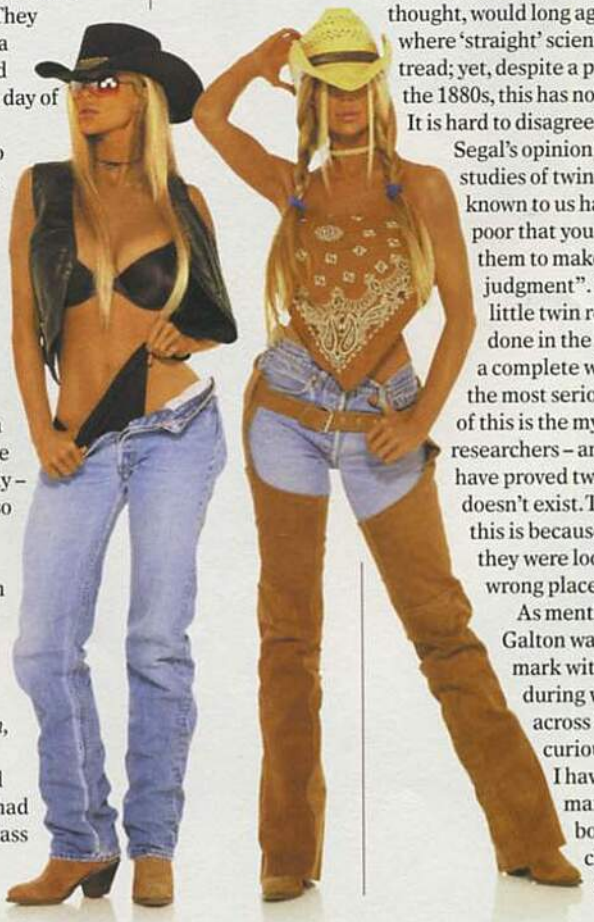
They both once wrote to the same magazine on the same day to ask the same question; and they both won £10 on the lottery in the same draw, and so on. Although telepathy was the one thing the twins were never tested for or questioned about at Minnesota, they did give a demonstration of a strange affinity. Asked – separately – to write a short sentence so that their handwriting could be compared, each wrote: "The cas [*sic*] sat on the mat". Yet, as Barbara Herbert told me recently, they have had no experience of actual telepathic *communication*, even though they phone each other frequently and learn that both have just had a sardine sandwich and glass of cider or whatever.

Remarkable as these concordances are, they are not compelling evidence for telepathy. Indeed, this seems to be something never experienced by separated twins, which is hardly surprising. All the evidence points to the need for a close bond in order for telepathy to take place, and if separated twins do not even know of the other's existence, as has often been the case, how can they form a bond?

Telepathy may well not have existed at Minnesota, yet it is not reasonable to make sweeping statements about *all* twins, as Segal and Watson have done, solely on the basis of studies of the tiny minority of separated ones.

ABOVE: One of the twin experiments conducted by J B Rhine at Duke University in the 1930s. One twin (left) tries to draw the picture that the other (right) is looking at.

BELOW: "It's a twin thing," say the supermodel Barbi Twins, Sia and Shane.



SIA AND SHANE BARBI/CORBIS OUTLINE

BIG SCIENTIFIC STUFF

Psi researchers, one might have thought, would long ago have rushed in where 'straight' scientists feared to tread; yet, despite a promising start in the 1880s, this has not been the case. It is hard to disagree with Nancy Segal's opinion that the few studies of twin telepathy known to us have been "so poor that you can't even use them to make an informed judgment". Much of what little twin research has been done in the psi labs has been a complete waste of time, and the most serious consequence of this is the myth that psi researchers – and psychologists – have proved twin telepathy doesn't exist. They have not; this is because, as we shall see, they were looking for it in the wrong places.

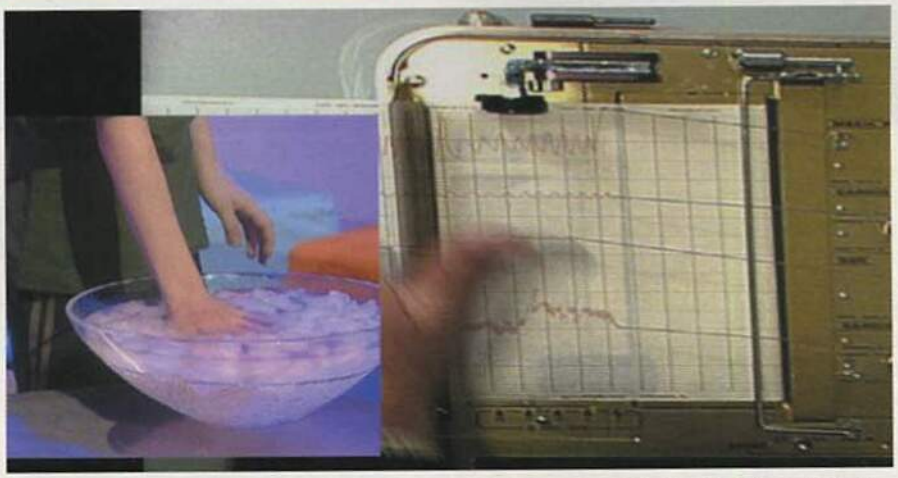
As mentioned above, Galton was first off the mark with his 1875 survey, during which he came across "one of the most curious anecdotes that I have received". A man in Scotland bought a set of champagne

CONT. P36 ➞

Telepathy Caught on Camera

In a series of televised experiments involving a pair of twins and a polygraph machine, GUY LYON PLAYFAIR thinks he may have captured evidence for telepathy on camera

Telepathy is strongest between bonded pairs



JEREMY BARRETT/POLYGRAPH SECURITY SERVICES

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TRUTH OR SCARE: While 'Twin A' is rigged to a polygraph operated by Jeremy Barrett (top), 'Twin B' plunges his hand into icy water. Twin A's reaction is recorded by the machine.

Polygraphist Jeremy Barrett has now supervised nine experiments involving six sets of identical twins (three of them tested twice) in which one of the pair was connected to a four-channel polygraph while the other was submitted to assorted surprises and harmless shocks in a separate and soundproof room. In addition to erupting pyramids and plunges into icy water, these have included a variety of joke spiders and exploding pens, nasty tastes and smells, and plates being hurled to the floor.

"It has worked every time to a greater or lesser degree," Barrett reports. "What we have done with the polygraph instrument is measure things happening which should not be happening.

"We are putting someone in a quiet and warm environment with no stimuli of any kind, where they are under no threat at all. Normally, the polygraph would simply be measuring their autonomic nervous reactions going on. There is nothing to make them nervous, nothing to create fear, panic, worry or anything like that. Yet, suddenly, their bodies are producing reactions based on what is happening to the other twin.

"When I've done this, it has always been under completely, rigorously secure conditions. I have not known at any time what was happening in the other room. I have Twin A with me in my quiet and secure environment. Twin B is somewhere else, and things are happening to Twin B. It transpires that things which cause fear, panic, fright or shock to Twin B cause reactions in Twin A. Things like taste and smell haven't worked particularly well with the twins that I've been involved with, but fear and shock have always come through to Twin A.

The personalities of the twins seem to have a lot to do with it. Extroverts with artistic abilities are now generally thought to be the best subjects for any kind of telepathy experiment, and the strongest reaction Barrett has seen on his polygraph chart to date has been that produced by the twins on the Paul McKenna show, the ebulliently extrovert pop singers Elaine and Evelyn Dove.

Another pair of his subjects was just the opposite, personality-wise. They were seven-year-olds whom Barrett describes as "very grave little people, like little old businessmen. They didn't giggle and smile and leap about, even when we saw afterwards what had been happening to Twin B in the other room, when plates were being dropped and pens were going bang, and he hardly batted an eyelid. So it's not surprising that we didn't get a lot coming through to his twin.

"We got something from them, but we certainly didn't get as strong a reaction as we got from the Powles boys (the pair seen on the Richard and Judy programme and in a Channel 5 feature due to be screened in May).

"There is absolutely no doubt at all in my mind that there is a communication taking place between these pairs of people which is beyond any explanation other than telepathy."

As John Harney pointed out in his recent Forum piece (***FT170:57***), the polygraph can be a controversial machine when it comes to establishing whether the likes of Travis Walton really were beamed up into other dimensions. In such cases, there is no incontrovertible independent evidence. In the twin experiments described here, however, there is. Nobody managed to film Walton as he shifted realities, but somebody did film each twin in every pair, with time-codes on the tapes making it possible to establish an exact correlation between distant stimulus and visible reaction beyond any reasonable doubt.

Though popularly and perhaps unjustifiably known as a "lie detector", the polygraph is simply a recording machine that picks up signals from a human body and puts them on paper. Detection is up to the operator, and the controversy sets in when the signals are interpreted to mean whatever the defence or prosecution want them to mean. In the twin tests, there is no need to interpret anything. If the signals are there, and they coincide again and again with something that is being done to one twin who is not wired up, then what is being recorded is beginning to look suspiciously like telepathy.

So, has telepathy been caught on camera? Possibly – if not, as yet, conclusively. At least it can now be said that there is quite a sizeable 'scintilla' of a suggestion that an identical twin, given an appropriate stimulus, can communicate instantaneously at a distance with the other one. I t can also be said that we now have a simple hypothesis that can easily be tested by anybody with access to a polygraph and a pair of twins. It goes like this:

Telepathy operates best between closely bonded pairs, and the closer the bond the stronger the signal. The identical twin bond can be the strongest there is, so that is where to look for the strongest signals. These can be found, and recorded, when all the conditions are right – the right kind of twin (extrovert, artistic, open to the idea of telepathy); the right conditions (sender tense, receiver relaxed) and the right kind of signal (shock, surprise, alarm). This is what Duane and Behrendt were claiming nearly 40 years ago, and although their report was greeted with volleys of derision, they may have had the last laugh.

CHANNEL 4/CACTUS TV

glasses as a surprise present for his twin brother, only to find that his brother in turn had "bought a similar set of precisely the same pattern as a surprise" for him.

Twins are still demonstrating what I call the '*Casablanca* Effect' ("Of all the gifts in all the gift shops in town, she buys the same as mine"). Last Christmas, for example, I know of a woman in London who sent her sister a purse only to receive an identical one from her, all the way from China.

It was not until 1882, with the founding of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), that the word telepathy came into the language and serious research into the subject began. Of the 700 spontaneous cases collected by the SPR from members of the public for its *Census of Hallucinations* (1886), five were clear examples of telepathy between twins (four identical, one fraternal); four of which involved an unexpected death and the fifth a potentially fatal accident. Yet almost as soon as twin telepathy research got started, it ground to a halt.

In the next 50 years, only a single paper on twin telepathy was published. Under the pretentious title 'An experimental investigation of the telepathy phenomenon in twins', it appeared in the first volume of JB Rhine's *Journal of Parapsychology* (1937). Only six pairs of twins were involved, of which just one were identical. They were made to guess those boring Zener cards and the only interesting part of the paper was the list of references – or rather the lack of one – which suggests that this attempt at investigation was the first of its kind.

In 1942, Chicago professor Horatio H Newman (himself a twin) published

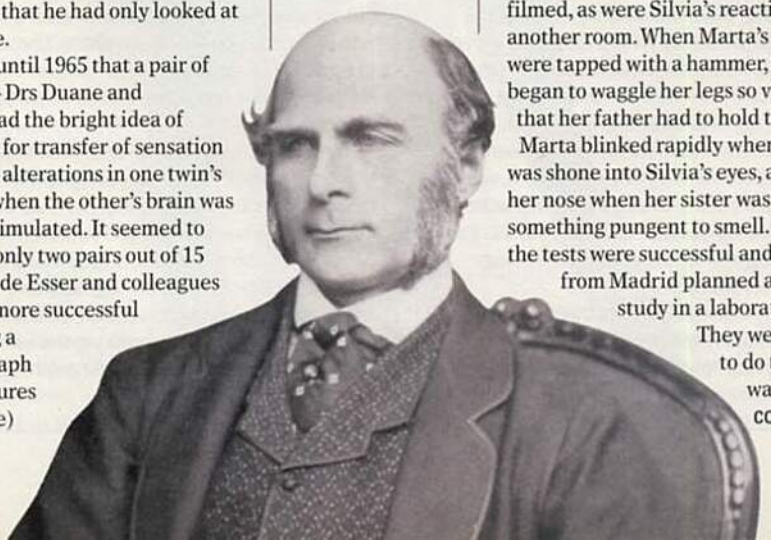
This is where we'd expect to find telepathy

Twins and Super-Twins, in which he gave several intriguing examples of what looked very much like telepathy between twins he had personally questioned. He also made a public appeal to JB Rhine to look into the matter. This was without much success since only one other twin paper has found its way into his journal to date (in 1946). Twenty-five years later, another book appeared with the strikingly original title *Twins and Supertwins*. Its author, Amram Scheinfeld, covered much the same ground as Newman, but he did manage to extract an opinion from Rhine. This was that "nothing outstanding has occurred in any single case of identical twins tested so far." He forgot to add that he had only looked at one such case.

It was not until 1965 that a pair of researchers – Drs Duane and Behrendt – had the bright idea of testing twins for transfer of sensation by observing alterations in one twin's brainwaves when the other's brain was artificially stimulated. It seemed to work, but in only two pairs out of 15 tested. Aristide Esser and colleagues were rather more successful in 1967 using a plethysmograph (which measures blood volume) to record responses in one twin to stimuli given to the other.

ABOVE: The Powles twins, along with Guy Lyon Playfair, appear on Channel 4's *Richard and Judy*.

BELOW: Francis Galton, first off the mark in studying identical twins.



A PAIN IN SPAIN

In 1976, an enterprising group of Spanish doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists took this approach a stage further in one of the most imaginative experiments of its kind to date. Their subjects were four-year-olds Silvia and Marta Landa, who had made it into their local paper when Marta burned her hand on a clothes iron. Although Silvia was 10 miles away at the time, she developed a large red blister on her hand just like her sister's.

The investigators gave Marta a standard medical check-up, which was filmed, as were Silvia's reactions in another room. When Marta's knees were tapped with a hammer, Silvia began to waggle her legs so vigorously that her father had to hold them down. Marta blinked rapidly when a light was shone into Silvia's eyes, and held her nose when her sister was given something pungent to smell. Nearly all the tests were successful and the team from Madrid planned a follow-up study in a laboratory. They were unable to do this, and it was not until

CONT. P40 ➞

Attack of the Pod People

As alike as two peas! BOB RICKARD reviews some recent accounts of twins in the light of Guy Lyon Playfair's 'twin telepathy' theory.

In the main article, Guy Lyon Playfair's research into the close correspondences between the experiences of identical twins suggests that the single, most important, factor is that both entities, both twins, were once part of the same, single entity. The big question is: when their particular zygote divides does it split a single mind – as well as a single body – into two? Many twins have described their deep-seated feeling of being "two halves of the same person".

This was the case with Ida Hume and Ruth Bennett, who were reunited after the family split up 63 years earlier. Ruth, who had stayed with an elder sister until she was seven, "always knew there was a twin", but it was her son who finally traced Ida using the Internet. Ida, who had no knowledge of her blood family, said she "always felt that I was a twin... that part of me was missing." *Scunthorpe Eve. Telegraph, 3 Mar 2001.*

ATLANTIC SYNDICATION

FAMILY SNAP: Identical twins Charlie and Willie Tait, who married a pair of sisters, with families.

Playfair's hypothesis predicts that, in cases of special closeness, what one twin does or experiences can be transferred to the other, even across great distances. For example, when Lee Barnes, of Bedford, was hit in the mouth with a bottle by a drunk in a pub, his twin Darren is reported to have felt the pain in his own face. *Times, 8 Feb 2000.*

Another characteristic of 'twin telepathy' is that they often develop their own special language, understandable only by themselves. Although probably quite rare, it tends to happen when the twins are young and fades as they get older and more involved in the greater world around them. The mother of nine-year-old twins Jordan and Anthony McKay of Portsmouth said: "They'd lie in bed and talk to each other in this funny way ... it sounded like Japanese. I don't know where it came from." She added that when Anthony had to have operations on his ear and had anæsthetic, Jordan, at home, would fall asleep at the same time. *Portsmouth News, 6 July 2002.*

While Playfair's theory predicts the 'best' empathic relationship between identical twins, it also applies to non-identical 'fraternal' twins. A good example is sisters Meagen and Amanda Baldwin who gave birth on the same day on different continents. Amanda, who now lives near Sydney, Australia, was due to give birth on 4 November, but had to be induced because she was overdue; while Maegen, who lives in Belgium and whose baby was not due until early December, went into labour early on 15 Nov 15. It is possible – and this accords with Playfair's hypothesis – that the induction of Amanda's baby triggered Maegen's labour 19,000km away. *Brisbane Sunday Mail, 1 Dec 2002.*

However, it is intriguing to speculate whether the telepathic bond can actually manipulate reality – not just across space but also across time – to bring about a desired synchronicity; whether it could actually manipulate several chains of cause and effect to delay Amanda's birth and bring forward Maegen's to coincide on the same day. Although the complexity of this idea challenges Occam's Razor (the rule that the simplest solution is usually the correct one) cases like that of twins Val Lyons and Hilary are truly puzzling. They acknowledge their closeness but were shocked to learn they both had breast cancer at the same time. Val, of Newport, Wales, rang Hilary, living in Canada, to tell her that her mastectomy had been successful, only to learn that her sister had been operated on at the same time. *Sunday Mirror, 30 Jan 2000.*

> **"They'd lie in bed and talk together in this funny way..."**

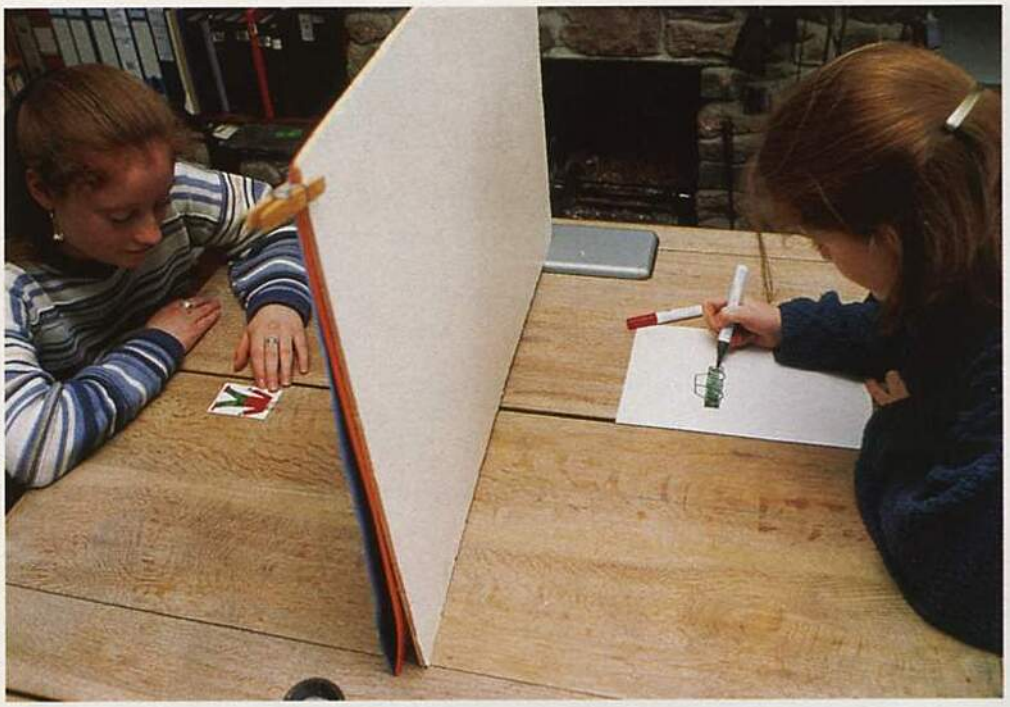
Dr Elizabeth Bryan, founder of the Multiple Birth Foundation at London's Charing Cross Hospital, said she was not surprised that identical twins might develop breast cancer at the same time as the predisposing gene is known and will be shared. "The fact that they were operated on the same day," she said, "is a big coincidence." Precisely! However, even if it is likely, as Dr Bryan suggests, that the bad news from Val caused sister Helen to examine herself and discover that she had the same cancer, of which she had been unaware, the timing of an operation is subject to the procedures of two quite different medical administrations, and we all know how those are prone to errors and delays.

Similarly, it is not surprising that Australian identical twins Debbie Plastina and Kim Pevy had their gall bladders out on the same day; they both shared an hereditary condition. Debbie was in the Gold Coast Hospital ward, waiting for her operation, when her sister was brought out of hers and into the adjacent bed. "I started laughing," said Debbie, "and told staff that was my twin sister. They hadn't realised because we have different surnames." (*Sydney Weekend Bulletin, 2 March 2002*). Is it feasible that 'twin telepathy' could manipulate the different environments that these twins live in to bring about their operations on the same day?

Playfair's prescription for 'twin telepathy' gets a strenuous workout with the families of Charlie and Willie Tait. The identical twins married a pair of sisters, who were not twins but who have very similar looks. Nearly everything about the lives of both families runs in parallel, down to having adjacent houses in Newcastle, same cars, food likes, jobs and the ages and spacing of their children. The families have experienced many coincidences which they attribute to their "natural empathy". *Daily Mail, 27 Dec 2001.*

An even closer match are identical twins Sean and Darren Duffy, of Oldham, Manchester, who married identical twins Maxine and Helen Chambers. All of them were born on the same day in the same hospital and now each couple has a baby that looks so similar to the other that even the parents have difficulty identifying which is which. Helpfully, the babies are of different sex. *Daily Mail, 29 Jan 2001.*

Surely, if the "biological basis of twin telepathy" has any validity, a serious study of these close twin and family units will provide the data.



DR SUSAN BLACKMORE/FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY

1997 that anybody seems to have had the idea of trying anything like it again. The somebody in question, I am proud to say, was me. I had been asked by the producers of *The Paranormal World of Paul McKenna* (Carlton TV) to come up with some suggestions and top of my list was a live twin-telepathy test. In due course a very lively teenager named Elaine Dove found herself facing a large pyramid put together for the occasion by the special effects crew while her sister Evelyn was in another room, wired to a four-channel polygraph under the expert supervision of Jeremy Barrett.

When Elaine was nicely relaxed, Paul McKenna gave a signal and the pyramid exploded with a loud bang, emitting masses of sparks and coloured smoke, giving Elaine quite a turn. At the same time, the polygraph monitoring Evelyn's respiration, pulse rate and galvanic skin response went completely bananas. The interesting finding was that Evelyn had not felt anything consciously, though she certainly did unconsciously.

I was able to help do this again in January 2003 with the eight-year-old Powles twins Richard and Damien for Channel 4's *Richard and Judy* programme. Again, Jeremy Barrett operated the polygraph connected to Richard, who sat quietly beside it while Damien, in another room, was given an assortment of surprises. The most successful of these were a joke box which released a huge rubber snake when opened, and a bucket of ice-cold water into which he was asked to plunge his arm. These made him gasp, and the sharp blip on the line recording Damien's respiration was so unmistakable that Mr Barrett, who had no idea what was going on next door, pointed to it as it appeared. Like Evelyn Dove, Richard Powles had no conscious awareness of what his twin was doing, although like her, as Mr Barrett put it, he "certainly picked up something from somewhere". Once again, so did his polygraph. It looked very ESP-like to me.

QUANTUM SPOOKINESS

Einstein was uneasy with the idea of "spooky effects at a distance", the words he used to describe an imaginary experiment which, he hoped, would disprove the existence of such effects. In referring to what has become known as the 'EPA paradox', physicist Danah Zohar writes, in *The Quantum Self* (1990), that this can be understood by imagining a hypothetical set of identical twins thousands of miles apart, one of whom is kicked downstairs and breaks a leg. If quantum theory is correct, she adds, "when the London twin is kicked, the Californian twin will suffer an identical fall at exactly the same moment and break his leg too, although no-one has kicked him."

Does this sound familiar? It should, since this is just what numerous twins have already experienced. I have at least three accounts of synchronised leg-breaking, and dozens of cases of simultaneous bruises, aches, pains, sudden bouts of depression – almost invariably bad news of some kind.

All of this makes psychologists uneasy, since it is not supposed to happen in a rational, mechanistic world. At the same time, physicists are becoming increasingly comfortable with the concept of correlated or entangled human pairs behaving much like those particles which, as Alain Aspect proved in a famous 1982 experiment, really do show "spooky effects at a distance".

In the words of a quantum specialist, physicist Amit Goswami: "Nonlocal mutual influence and communication between humans has been known for millennia in the domain of mental thought. It's called telepathy." This, he adds, seems to be "suggesting quantum nonlocality of thought between minds that are suitably correlated". Such minds include those of dogs and their owners, mothers and babies and, since theirs is the strongest and longest-lasting bond of all, identical twins.

This is where we would expect to find telepathy at full strength, as indeed we do. Not all twins experience it, perhaps no more than a third. To send or receive the psi message, they have to be the right type of twin, they have to be in the right states of mind and the message has to be a powerful one, preferably involving pain or shock of some kind (see panel – p37).

There is indeed a twin thing... and a very simple way of demonstrating it. There is also an explanation in sight. It is beginning to look very much like a quantum thing. FT

ABOVE: One of Dr Susan Blackmore's experiments to test ESP in twins; she found no persuasive evidence for twin telepathy.

NOTE

1 In Mary Rosambeau's private survey – described in *How Twins Grow Up* (1987) – 600 twins or parents of twins were asked the questions: "Have you or your twin(s) had any experience which might be explained as being able to read each other's minds?", and "Have you ever been surprised by both of you having the same illness or pain at the same time?" A total of 183 (30.5%) replied yes.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

GUY LYON PLAYFAIR is a member of the Scientific and Medical Network, the SPR and the College of Psychic Studies. Best known for his investigation of the Enfield poltergeist case, described in This House is Haunted, he has written widely on various aspects of the paranormal.

RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED READING

Twin Telepathy: The Psychic connection
Guy Lyon Playfair (Vega, 2002)

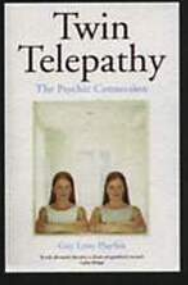
The Curious World of Twins
V Gaddis and M Gaddis (Hawthorn, 1972)

The Quantum Self
Danah Zohar (Bloomsbury, 1990)

RECOMMENDED SURFING

www.dprogram.com/twin_telepathy.html
Guy Lyon Playfair's *Twin Telepathy* book

Competition



Thanks to Vega, we have five copies of Guy Lyon Playfair's definitive Twin Telepathy – The Psychic Connection to give away. Just tell us:

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That synching feeling

We've all experienced 'meaningful coincidences', but the great psychoanlyst CG Jung believed they offered a key to understanding the relationship between consciousness and matter, as well as underlying a host of paranormal phenomena. LUCIA RING-WATKINS grapples with Jung's theory of synchronicity.

Magicians, quantum physicists, Jungian scholars and fans of Robert Anton Wilson alike will be familiar with the term synchronicity – the theory of an acausal connecting principle underlying events, more commonly thought of as the idea of "meaningful coincidence". We've all experienced something like this. To give an example: you have a dream about an old friend you haven't seen for some time – the next day, that friend calls you. Was it a premonition, or an example of telepathy? Perhaps, like Jung, we should try to look past the paranormal jargon to the psychological state of the experiencers involved – maybe here we shall find some common connection or explanation, and discover within Jung's many, often difficult, works a surprisingly mystical outlook.

First, a little case material. The treatment of one of Jung's patients was proceeding slowly due to her unyielding armour of rationality. In one session, the patient was telling Jung about a striking dream in which she was given a costly piece of scarab jewellery, when they heard a tapping at the window. Upon inspection, Jung saw the source of the tapping to be a rose chafer, a golden-green coloured beetle that closely resembles the scarab. Jung opened the window, caught the beetle as it came in and presented it to his patient with the words: "Here is your scarab". Her intellectual shell was punctured by this coincidence, and her treatment could be continued successfully.

This extraordinary correlation of inner and outer

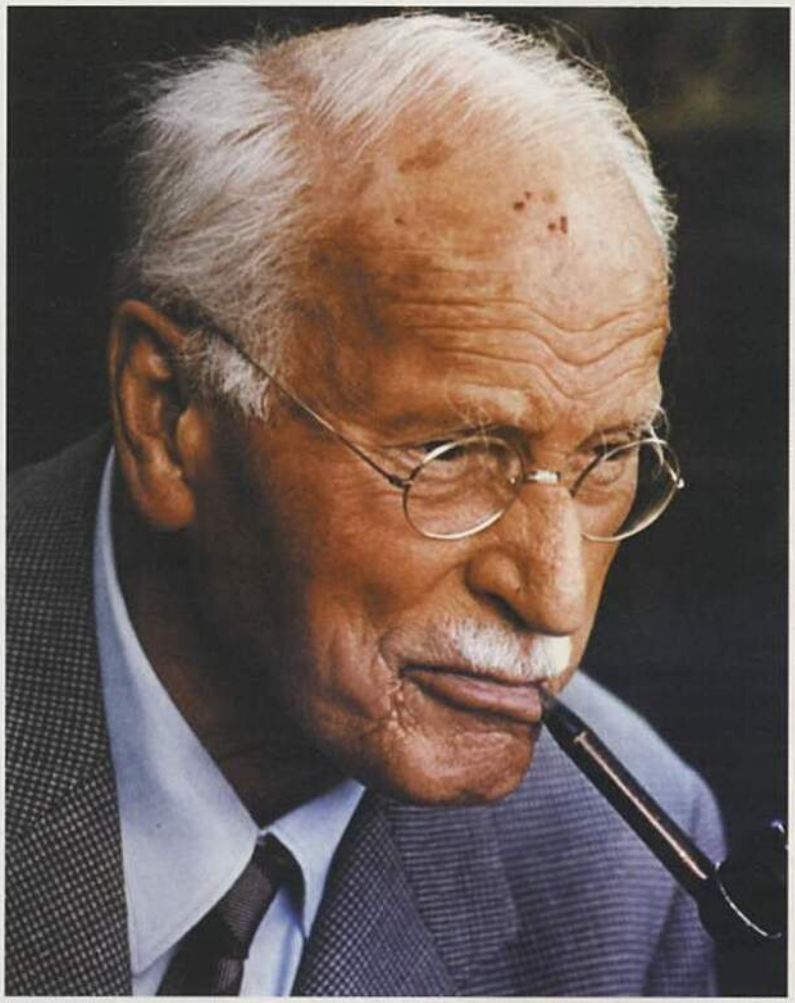
Like Jung, we should try to look past the paranormal jargon

events is meaningful in terms of the positive impact it had on the patient's mental health. Jung would phrase this as the impact it had on the woman's "individuation". Individuation is the goal and process of Jung's therapeutic method; the integration of conscious and unconscious contents to create a balanced perspective between the two, known as the "self". It is the same process at work in synchronicity.

To really understand the individuation process, we need to look at how Jung conceives the mind, a model rather different from the more familiar Freudian one that has trickled down into most 'pop' psychology. Jung's model of the psyche is made up of a number of (not necessarily discrete) elements.

Firstly, there is consciousness, or the ego – made up of everything we are currently seeing, feeling and thinking. Then there is the unconscious, which for Jung consists of two layers, personal and collective. Acquired throughout life, the contents of the personal unconscious are unique to each individual and consist of memories, subliminal perceptions and repressed contents, everything we see and feel but are not explicitly conscious of or currently focused on. What

JAN VAN DER VEKEN



BETTMANN/CORBIS

LEFT: Even in his later years Jung showed a boundless curiosity about everything from quantum physics to UFOs.

Jung refers to as the 'self' is really both the 'nucleus' of the psyche and the total of all these other psychic elements, the balance of conscious and unconscious processes.

But it is the collective unconscious that is Jung's greatest and most controversial brainchild. Identical in each individual, the collective unconscious is inalterable throughout life and is made up of what Jung called the "archetypes" – inherited blueprints of apprehension and action for situations of universal import. Jung discovered the archetypes by observing certain recurring patterns or symbols in his patients' dreams and fantasies at times of personal importance; he noted that these symbolic forces seemed to direct his patients toward a restoration of their psychic 'balance'.

ARCHETYPAL

Examples of archetypes are birth and rebirth, rites of passage and the trickster figure – all expressing themselves through the symbols found in myths and religions: the fish, the moon and so on. These are universally important situations to which the archetypes represent the universal answer, drawing patients towards the most beneficial course of action by their numinosity. This numinosity, and the emotional power it generates, is the language and the hallmark of the archetype. Great emotion mobilises the archetype, and the archetypes use their ability to inspire emotion to attract unconscious contents to them, which they then shape into their pattern or image.

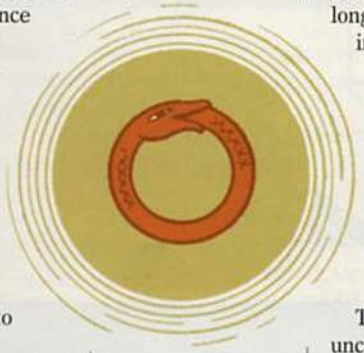
All these levels of the psyche work together as compensatory and self-regulating. The psyche has its own means of keeping itself in balance by listening to the messages provided by the personal and collective unconscious. Synchronicities, along with dreams and daydreams are the forums where the unconscious messages are displayed. The message is rarely literal, rather it uses symbols that point beyond themselves to a deeper level of meaning, that, once decoded, provides whatever is necessary to counterbalance the conscious attitude and adapt to the situation in hand. One has to follow the clues provided by the symbols into the murky regions of the unconscious; and one can't just dive straight into these depths of the psyche, for many complexes are powerfully repressed. The aim is to open a dialogue between consciousness and unconsciousness until a compromise that takes both positions into account is reached. Individual compensatory events, when looked at from a bigger perspective, seem to hang together, as though part of a plan for personal evolution.

We can, then, draw a partial picture of how synchronicities might happen. There is a conscious attitude that needs to be compensated for the individual to progress. This creates a highly emotional state, which attracts, or enables access to, the archetypal dimension. Using its great numinosity, the archetype attracts unconscious contents to itself, which it manipulates into a symbolic representation of its archetypal message and propels into consciousness. This creates the internal part of the synchronicity – the dream of the scarab that guided the patient towards a point of balance.

But what about the external component of the synchronicity – the beetle flying into the room? The woman's dream almost seems to indicate that she somehow knew that a beetle was going to tap on the window during her session with Jung. But how could she know about an event that is seemingly completely independent of her own being before it has happened? Doesn't this violate the laws of time and space? Such a worry is symptomatic of our overly objective and absolute view of space and time. Just because all our experience is spatio-temporal, we assume space and time exist objectively 'out there', and forget that space and time could just be our mode of perception – the way our minds frame events in order to understand them. Einstein can help shake our absolute view of space and time with his theory of special relativity. Special relativity shows that, contrary to our impressions of space and time as being separate – three-dimensional space existing through time – space and time are in fact inextricably interwoven into a four-dimensional space-time continuum. Space and time are also not absolute and independent; they are actually dependent on or relative to the velocity of the observer's frame of reference.[1] This makes space and time *observer dependent*.

BEYOND TIME AND SPACE

Before we examine how the physical component of the synchronicity works, we must first alter our way of looking at the world. Now that space and time no longer hold absolute sway, we can introduce another feature of the collective unconscious – its non-spatial, non-temporal nature – that will help us to understand what 'collective' really implies in this context. Non-spatial means there are no boundaries, and therefore no multiple "collective unconsciouses", for to multiply requires clearly definable units.



This means that the collective unconscious is not individual and discrete in each person, like the personal unconscious; there is instead a singular collective unconscious that we all participate in totally and equally. This is what leads Jung to say: "the *collective unconscious*... behaves as if it were *one* and not as if it were split up into many individuals. It is non-personal... It is the same everywhere and at all times..."[2]

The non-spatial nature of the archetypes also means the collective unconscious exists throughout Nature as a whole. Nature, for Jung, is the totality

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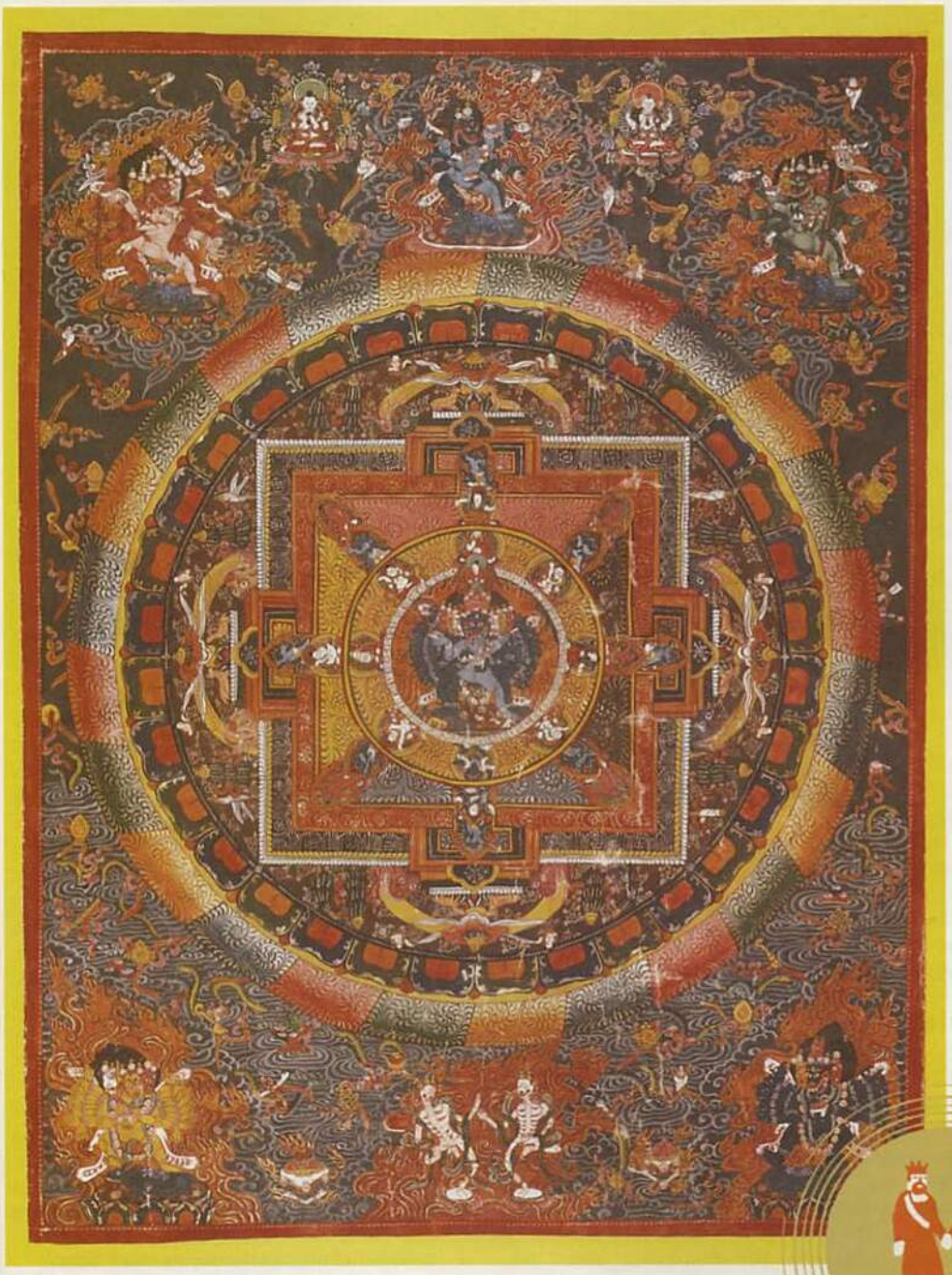

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Are our experiences of psyche and matter so different?

of the Universe, mind, matter, and all that is unknown, near and far. Jung claims that the collective unconscious exists throughout all of nature, not just as part of the psyche. The archetypes cannot be divided into parts, or exist in something partially, as the concept of physical division makes no sense without space. This leap from assuming the collective unconscious is acting in mind to assuming it is active in matter seems an unjustified one to many people; for Jung, as we shall see, it is not much of a leap at all. Since the collective conscious interacts with us, as indicated by the mythological symbols in dreams and synchronicities, and we are part of nature, so the collective unconscious participates in the whole of nature. This is what Jung means when he says: "The collective unconscious is more like an atmosphere in which we live rather than something that is found in us."[2] If the archetypes cannot be divided into spatial parts, neither can they be divided into the temporal divisions of past, present, and future; they exist everywhere in nature, at all times, simultaneously.

The collective unconscious, then, is singular, and exists throughout nature as a whole, past, present and future. In the archetypal dimension of the collective unconscious, all events, at any time and any place in nature, are accessible to the archetype's metaphorical gaze. Emotional extremes provide access to this all-pervading archetypal dimension and are what give rise to the extraordinary inner images of synchronicity with their sense of "absolute knowledge."

But what about the beetle's unusual inclination to enter the darkened room? Did the archetype somehow have a part to play in that, too? In order to answer this question, we must first alter our world-view and make the leap between mind and matter. Here we come to the psychoid nature of the archetype – its quasi-psychic, quasi-material aspect. Jung employs the idea of the collective unconscious as a bridge between psyche and matter by postulating that these two seemingly disparate realms are simply two different expressions of the same underlying unity. But how is it that psyche and matter could be essentially one and the same?

Firstly, we need to ask whether our experiences of psyche and matter are really so different. After all, our experience of both could be seen as residing in 'mental images'. "Obviously, our experience of the psyche is mental," I hear you cry, "but what about this?" – you say, kicking a stone and sending it spinning into the air. You think you have touched matter; proved its existence? No – you have merely received the mental, sensory impression of movement, and possibly the sensory impression of a bruised toe. You can never break outside of your sensory impressions to the matter underneath. Our experience of both matter and psyche is mental, so why do we posit multiple entities behind our one psychic level of experience? In doing so we irrevocably sunder subject from object, forever distancing ourselves from the 'true' nature of existence, and violating the principle of Occam's Razor: that entities should not be multiplied more than is necessary.

ABOVE: A Tibetan mandala, based on the plan of Mount Meru and used for meditation. For Jung, the mandala was a powerful symbol of the self.

UNUS MUNDUS

Let us erase the problems of the subject-object divide, and posit the collective unconscious as a unity underlying the manifold experiences of the senses, that exists throughout nature and ourselves, past, present and future simultaneously. Jung also calls this dimension the *Unus Mundus*, or primal unity. The *Unus Mundus* is not just a metaphor, it has a very real existence which subsumes the world of our experience; "like an atmosphere in which we live". Jung says the *Unus Mundus* is "the potential world of the first day of creation, when nothing

The black tide of mud...

DAVID SUTTON argues that Jung's theory of synchronicity was partly fuelled by his life-long interest in the paranormal – an interest that contributed to his split with Freud and guided much of his later life and work.

Carl Gustav Jung's attempt to formulate a theory of synchronicity was in many ways the culmination, and logical outcome, of his life-long interest in the paranormal and the areas of human experience that conventional scientific thought had failed to examine.

Born in Switzerland in 1876, Jung was something of an outsider from the start. The son of a parson in the Swiss Reformed Church, he was a bright, slightly odd child, profoundly affected by his father's struggles with his faith; at the age of 12 he had a dream in which God took a shit and a gigantic turd came crashing down from the heavens onto Basel Cathedral, smashing it to pieces. Jung's ambivalent relationship with institutional religion would never be easy.

Another early influence was the decidedly unconventional mediumistic abilities of his mother's side of the family; his grandmother had once spent three days in a trance, communicating with the spirits of the dead and spouting prophecy. When Jung made the decision to abandon his first love, philosophy, in favour of studying medicine, he based his doctoral thesis on a study of his own cousin's spiritualistic practices. [1]

Jung never gave up this early interest in parapsychology, keeping abreast of current research in the field and trying to fit it into a psychological framework that could help make sense of such reported phenomena.

After working as an assistant at a psychiatric clinic, where he was fascinated by the hidden layers of meaning to be found in the supposedly 'nonsensical' delusions of schizophrenic patients, Jung eventually met his great mentor, Sigmund Freud. At first the younger man championed Freud's explosive and unpopular ideas but, before long, Jung's interest in the paranormal became the occasion for intense rows between the two men. On one such occasion, Jung had raised the topic of precognition, which fascinated him, much to Freud's annoyance; as the master delivered a diatribe against such nonsense Jung felt as if his "diaphragm were made of iron and were becoming red hot. And at that moment there was such a loud report in the bookcase which stood right next to us, that we both started up in alarm... I said to Freud 'There, that is an example of a so-called catalytic exteriorisation phenomenon.'

'Oh come', he replied, 'that is sheer bosh'."

Jung, to prove his point, predicted there would be another loud bang; at which point the bookcase detonated once again.

Jung felt guilty, as if he had done something "against" Freud, and the episode was never again discussed between them. But

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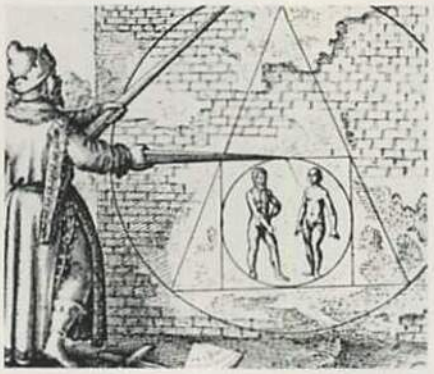
SQUARING THE CIRCLE: Jung with Freud (left), who disapproved of his younger colleague's interest in occult subjects like alchemy (below).



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In his dream a gigantic turd crashed down onto Basel cathedral...

the die was cast. While Freud believed psychoanalysis acted as a defence against "the black tide of mud of occultism", his hopes for a young successor to his throne were dashed in an appropriately Oedipal manner by Jung's rebellion against Freud's dogmatic reductionism, lack of interest in curative psychiatry and fixation on sexual repression as the basis of all human psychology. Jung's heresy was exposed for all to see with the publication of *The Psychology of the Unconscious* in 1912, and the relationship was over.

Jung was now on his own; he resigned his academic posts and his presidency of the International Psychoanalytic Society and entered the years of his 'creative illness', a prolonged period of dreams, visions and intensely real fantasies (or of a complete psychotic breakdown, as some writers have suggested) from which he brought back bizarre, gnostic-influenced texts like his *Seven Sermons to the Dead* of 1916.

Jung's visit to the Underworld had strengthened him in his conviction that he was on the right track, and the rest of his life was dedicated to the creation of a psychological model that could take on board the elements of human experience banished from the Freudian schema – religious and spiritual impulses, apprehensions of the numinous and daimonic, the potential for individuation; it was the return of modern psychology's own repressed.

Jung, soaked in the Germanic culture of his beloved Goethe and Neitzsche, travelled the world to 'de-Europeanise' his thought, meeting Bushmen in the Kalahari, Pueblo Indians in New Mexico and holy men in India, all of whom had a profound effect on his thinking. The study of alchemy and astrology took up more and more of his time, as did a fascination with Eastern divinatory methods such as the *I Ching*, in which Jung believed he had found a crucial analogue of his own developing ideas about synchronicity. A near-death experience in 1944 merely provided more grist to his mill, and the advent of the UFO phenomenon in the late 1940s gave him an ideal opportunity to focus his seemingly inexhaustible curiosity on an utterly modern example of the interaction between the human mind and the unknown, with saucers acting as highly-charged symbols mediating the two.

Since his death on 6 June 1961 (when a huge storm arose over Lake Geneva and lightning struck his favourite tree), Jung's reputation has suffered at the hands of an increasingly reductive psychoanalytical establishment, but the impact of his ideas on the counter-culture and in the humanities has continued. His huge legacy of written work continues to provide inspiration for forteans – witness Patrick Harpur's brilliant application of Jungian concepts to fortean topics in his book *Daimonic Reality* – and will undoubtedly continue to throw up new lines of enquiry for some time to come.

1. Published in 1902 as "On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena".

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was yet 'in actu' i.e., divided into two and many, but was still one... a potential world, the eternal Ground of all empirical being." [4] It is the world before it is clothed in matter, beyond the multiplicity of the senses. The *Unus Mundus* is not purely physical, or purely psychic, it is a third thing which is both and therefore neither, a transcendental principle that is the reality behind our perceptions, "an other-valued reality behind the phenomenal world" [5] and as such is unknowable. Being outside of space and time, which are indispensable criteria for our knowledge, we cannot know the *Unus Mundus* intellectually. However we can experience it directly, and synchronicities, where both matter and psyche express the same archetypal message, are a direct experience of the primal unity of all existence.

Jung believes this non-temporal, non-spatial unified world has a real existence that subsumes the world of our everyday experience, and certain experiments of quantum physics would seem to confirm the reality of the *Unus Mundus*, too. The Aspect experiment, for instance, seems to show that communication is possible between different parts of a physical system at faster than the speed of light; true instantaneous action at a distance. [6] Here, we either need to scrap the hallowed and tremendously useful locality principle – that nothing can travel faster than the speed of light – or we have to see that action-at-a-distance is itself a somewhat deceptive phrase. It is not a case of independently existing objects that communicate faster than the speed of light, it is simply the unity of the system.

Now we can see that psyche and matter are merely two different expressions of the same principle, it is much easier to understand how the archetypes can affect matter. Matter and psyche consist of the same stuff, so the archetypes affect matter in the same way as they do the psyche; attracting contents by their numinous nature, which they then manipulate into a symbolic representation of their message. So, by the draw of their emotional charge, the archetypes make tapping on the window seem more attractive for the beetle than flying off into the night. Jung repeatedly stresses that this archetypal method of influence is *not causal*, because he is denying narrow, classical causality, as advocated by his one-time teacher Freud. Narrow causality relies on necessity; if B follows A, then A must, in every instance, lead to B. This is not the case in synchronicity, as the archetype, as a ground theme of which there are many varying representations, could have led to archetypal scarab image B, or another symbol of rebirth, the sun, C. The beetle could also have been tapping on the window regardless of any archetypal interference – the archetype merely tipped the probability scales.

But there is another strain of causality other than the classical: purposive, final causality – such as the fact that I took driving lessons because I wanted to know how to drive. Jung describes final causes as individual events in the chain that have causal determinants, but the overall linking between the events, the meaning, is only understandable in terms of end results. It is this final cause that can most closely approximate synchronicity. This is why Jung says: "synchronicity represents a *direct act of creation* which manifests itself as chance." [7] It is an act of creation because creation is purposive, not explainable in terms of what happened before it, but only explainable in terms of end results. The outcome is something new and unpredictable.

Jung postulates synchronicity as another form of connection between events, which, as a conditional connection, means the meaningful coincidence can always be viewed as pure chance. Whereas the classical, causal method of connection between events represents the Aristotlian 'yes and no', synchronicity is the Universe's 'maybe', where the operation of the numinous archetype makes both matter and psyche that represent its pattern more likely to manifest than other, mundane options. It is not a question of proof, as the beetle may well have entered the room without the archetypal intervention; all we are left with is a striking impression of convenience and probability.

Jung's essays are not so much fully explanatory as symbolic, giving us enticing hints towards a deeper meaning, suggesting that beneath the manifold manifestations of experience there is a timeless, spaceless unity that exists throughout Nature as a whole. Synchronicities, where the same individuational message is displayed in both psyche and matter, are a direct experience of this transcendental unity. As expressions of a compensatory mechanism at work in Nature, the archetypes affect probability to express age-old psychological situations with symbols that aim to evolve the personality of the individual, and possibly society as a whole. FT

NICKY DE VAN MAY

ABOVE: Using the traditional yarrow sticks, a Chinese woman consults the *I Ching*; Jung found many analogues of his own theory of synchronicity in both Chinese alchemical texts and divinatory systems.

NOTES

1 Victor Mansfield, *Synchronicity, Science, and Soul-Making*, Ch7.

2 Letter to JB Rhine 1945, *Letters* vol1, p393–5, from *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*, Roderick Main

3 CG Jung's letters 1946, from CG Jung's *Psychology of Religion and Synchronicity*, Robert Aziz

4 CG Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 1955–56, p760

5 CG Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, 1963, p283

6 Victor Mansfield, *Synchronicity, Science, and Soul-Making*, p235

7 CG Jung, *Letters on Synchronicity*, 1950–55.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

LUCIA RING-WATKINS is a 23-year-old philsophy graduate, the editor of adult magazine Just Girls, and deputy editor of MensWorld. Her experience so far has taught her that there is no absolute truth, and anything is possible. This is her first piece for Fortean Times.

RESOURCES

● RECOMMENDED READING

Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle
C G Jung (Routledge, 1985)

Memories, Dreams, Reflections
C G Jung (Fontana Press, 1983)

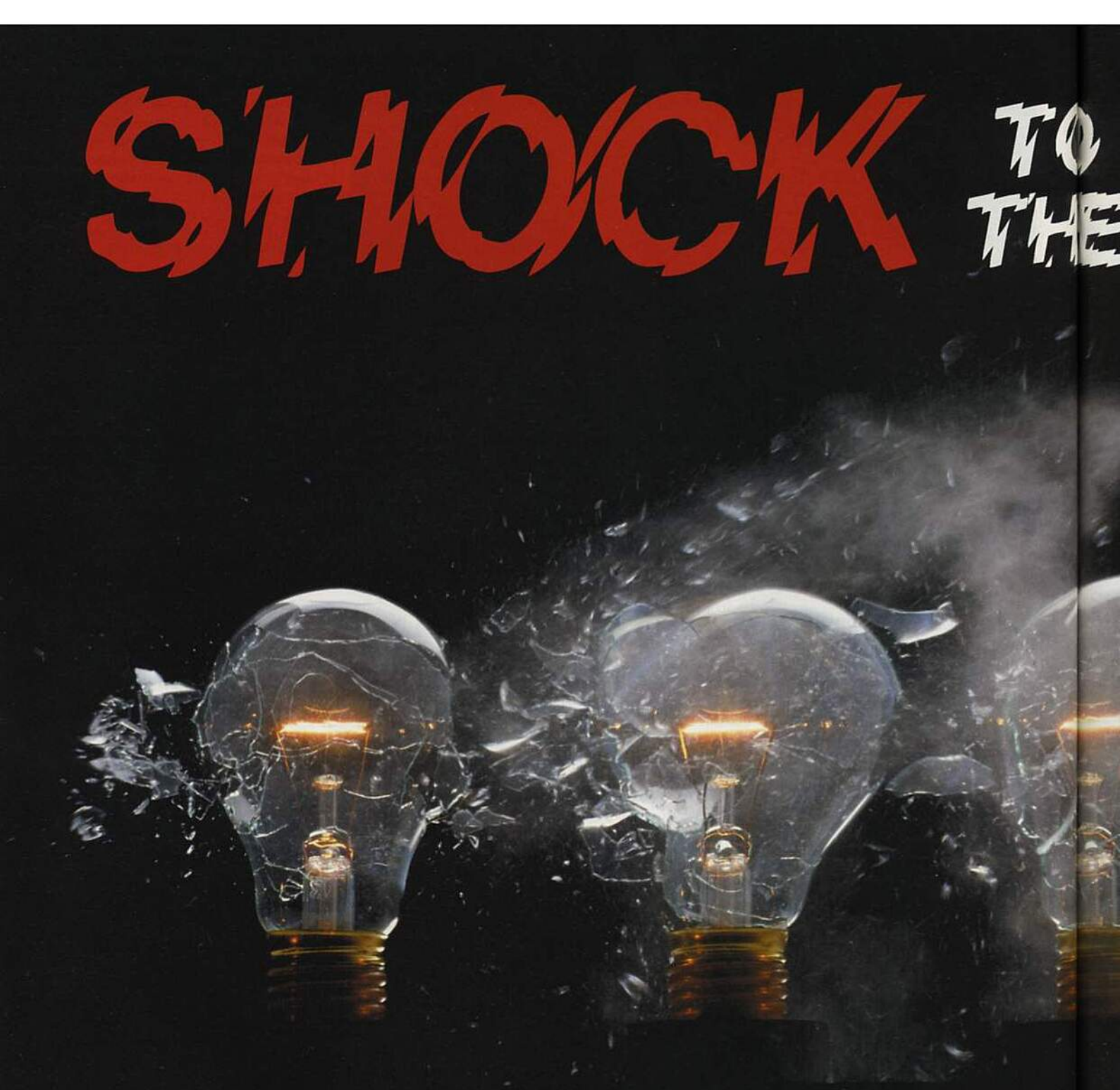
Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal
Ed Roderick Main (Priceton University Press, 1998)

■ RECOMMENDED SURFING

www.strangemag.com/mysteryofchance.html
A *Strange* magazine article by Peter A Jordan

skepdic.com/jung.html
A 'skeptical' demolition of Jung and his work

SHOCK TO THE



Why was a pensioner continually plagued by weird electrical phenomena? BILL LOVE decided to investigate... and things got even stranger.

MAIN IMAGE: DON FARRALL/GETTY IMAGES

On 12 March 1987 my eye was caught by a story in the *Daily Mail*: "Experts are in the dark – Pensioner Frank finds home a big switch-off", read the headline. On reading the report, about strange electrical disturbances taking place in the Somerset home of an elderly Burma veteran, I was puzzled. How could 2000 volt surges find their way into a domestic electrical installation, where they plagued the occupants of the cottage with bizarre phenomena, and why should engineers be baffled by what appeared to be an obvious intrusion of such excess power? The report mentioned that more than 20 bulbs were replaced every week, TV sets, kettles and the cooker had been wrecked, ceiling roses and switches destroyed, an uncountable number of fuses had blown and lampshades had burst into flames. This did seem to suggest that very high voltages were invading the Frank Pattemore's home at Iverson Cottage - but where did they come from and why were they so elusive that engineers were unable to trace their origin? From a purely scientific point of view, the case seemed to be worthy of investigation.

I decided to write to the Area

SYSTEM

VERY HIGH VOLTAGES WERE INVADING FRANK PATTEMORE'S HOME AT IVERSON COTTAGE

Manager of SWEB (South Western Electricity Board), the electricity supply authority. In a letter dated 19 March, 1987 I said that the phenomena at Iverson Cottage interested me and suggested that the problem appeared to be an intermittent induced emf. (electromotive force). I enquired whether there were any inducing fields in the area of sufficient magnitude to cause such a large emf and asked whether the surges were confined to the consumer's side of the meter.

The reply from GAR Dickinson, the Area Engineering Manager, said that SWEB saw the problem as a difficult intermittent earthing fault that had been given "a magnified treatment by the media". He didn't mention that the phenomena had been extant for some five years. Why should such an earthing fault, even a difficult one, take five years to rectify I wondered. If SWEB engineers, after carrying out three rewires, were genuinely unable to solve this problem, was Iverson Cottage experiencing effects which did not obey the known laws of electromagnetism or was something more sinister at work?

After communicating with Frank Pattemore for six months I had learned of a police involvement, an investigation by the Cook Report Team and the existence of a mysterious 'Capenhurst Report', which had been produced by ECRC (The Electricity Council Research Centre) after they had been commissioned by SWEB. There definitely seemed to be something untoward about this case. ➞

On the 21 September, 1987 I again wrote to SWEB's Mr Dickinson asking three questions:-

Why was it necessary to call in ECRC, and was it true that their equipment had been damaged?

Why did three rewires fail to rectify the fault and did this mean that the fault was outside SWEB's control?

Why should the phenomena have appeared first in the cooker and then have spread *gradually* to the whole installation?

I also told him of my intention to visit Iverson Cottage and asked him for his comments on this proposal; did he for example, consider the matter to be too sensitive? In his reply dated 29 September, he completely ignored my questions and stated that the Board's investigation had been completed. He went on to say:"With regard to your intention to visit Mr Pattemore, I would advise against it at this stage as he is obviously upset at the implication of the police involvement. I believe the phenomena are now much reduced in intensity and you may find that after a while there is little for you to investigate".

This was not what Frank Pattemore had been telling me in correspondence and not what the local Press had been reporting. I was puzzled. All the appliances damaged or completely burnt out were protected, on a ring main or a lighting circuit, by a fuse of an appropriate value, so why didn't the fuse give protection? Even more to the point, why weren't SWEB interested enough to at least investigate reports of voltages exceeding 2kV?

I contacted others who had been involved, in various ways, with the Pattemores; one of these was Roy Jones, a local businessman and former chairman of Somerton Parish Council who had tried to solve the mystery himself. Although he had the assistance of the media, all Roy's efforts proved to be in vain and, in some desperation, he wrote to Robert Boscawan, the MP for Somerton. In a letter, dated 17 January 1990, Roy pointed out that, despite the ongoing phenomena, "nobody wished to become involved or to express an opinion except in dark and mysterious sentences," and that "Mr Pattemore is convinced, rightly or wrongly, that some military or supernatural phenomena are responsible. Who can blame him for harbouring such opinions?"

Who indeed? By this time, Frank had been visited by uncountable numbers of well-wishers and experts; spiritualists, dowsers, exorcists, ghost hunters, psychic researchers and men in dark suits who arrived unannounced, delved into brief-cases to produce maps and other documents but could not be traced on the contact telephone numbers which they left.

Roy shared his correspondence with the authorities with me, and it was his letter of 3 May 1990, addressed to Mr. Nicol, Chairman of SWEB, that finally decided me to visit Somerton for myself. I had pondered long over the following sentence in this letter: "We are now using the Social Services Department in an attempt to have Mr Pattemore re-housed and his house permanently sealed up as advised by your Area Manager in the only phone conversation I have been able to have with the reluctant Mr. Merrick". What possible reason could there be for an electricity authority to want a private house permanently sealed up?

A statement, signed by Frank Pattemore, was appended to this letter and the contents only added to the mystery surrounding this whole saga: "When I asked Mr. Lees of SWEB, Bristol, in 1987 to support me on his findings of very high voltage to my cottage he said 'I have been taken off the case and forbidden to talk to anyone. I'm over a barrel. This is the first time in 30 years that my findings have been rejected. I'm held to ransom. I wish I could help you' "

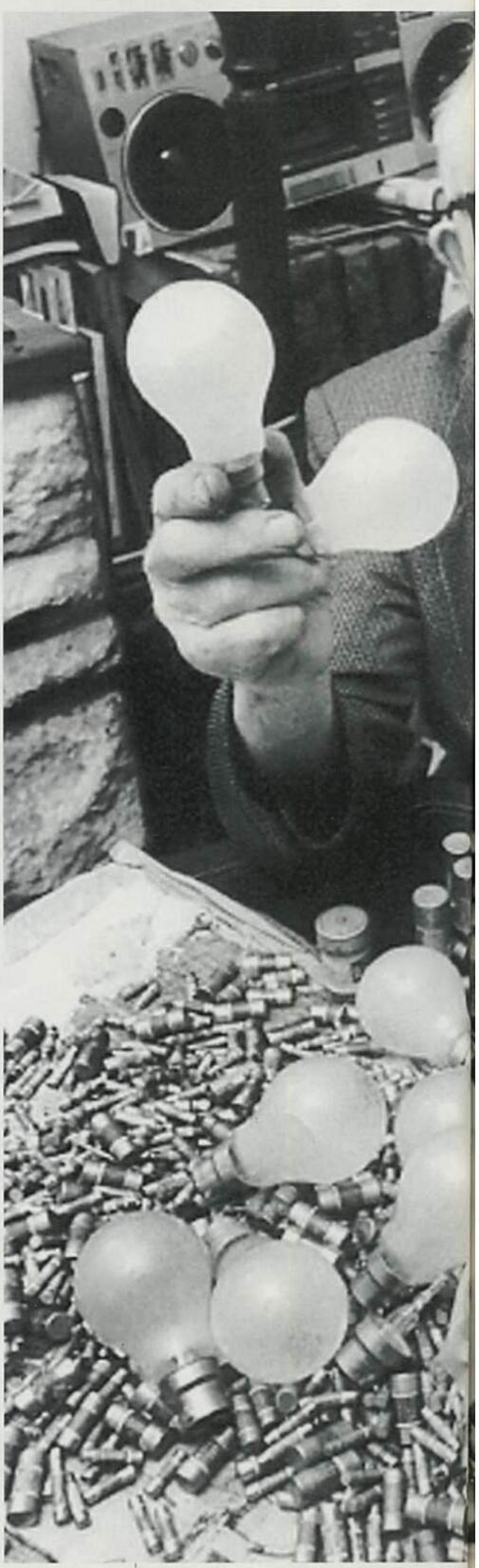
This statement was corroborated during a telephone conversation I had with Jim Lees, a senior engineer based at SWEB Head Office in Bristol. The mystery deepened further when he said that SWEB employees had been told not to park cars or vans immediately outside Iverson Cottage because there had been problems with ignition systems and vehicles had to be pushed along the road before they could be started.

TEA, BISCUITS AND BLACK STREAMS

During my first visit to Somerton I was accompanied by a physicist, an electrical engineer, a radio engineer and some rudimentary apparatus - a 1kV multimeter, an ionising radiation detector, a surge clock, an oscilloscope and a search coil. By 2pm. we were introducing ourselves to Frank Pattemore and his son Nigel, and were welcomed into the living room to meet Mike, an investigative journalist, and his photographer Brenda. Over tea and biscuits we began to listen to a general outline of the case.

Frank told us that about 11 months earlier, someone from SWEB had located a force of some kind running diagonally from the kitchen door to the front door. The unidentified official was using an instrument that lit up as it was moved along this diagonal.

Hamish Miller, the well-known dowser and author of a recently published book *The Sun and the Serpent*, was going to arrive at about 3.30pm. so we decided to break off the conversation to see what we could find with our search coil. We were not disappointed; there was still a definite field extending diagonally across the living room and the effect was confined to a narrow beam, which peaked at floor level about 1.5 m from the front door. We were anxious to discover whether



WESTERN GAZETTE

LEFT: Frank Pattemore surrounded by blown fuses and damaged bulbs.

FRANK WAS VISITED BY GHOST HUNTERS, EXORCISTS, DOWSERS AND MEN IN DARK SUITS

Hamish and his co-author, photographer, writer and earth mysteries expert, Paul Broadhurst would be able to locate this same force field with a pair of dowsing rods.

At 3.30 on the dot they arrived. We watched in awe as Hamish, brandishing his dowsing rods, walked across the living room. The movement of the rods was meaningless to us but there was no doubt that they *were* moving, apparently of their own accord. Hamish said "There is a very strong force evident along this diagonal". He had found, with a pair of dowsing rods made in his forge for a couple of pounds, exactly what we had discovered with our search coil and a SWEB engineer had found with some kind of field detector. We were impressed. Hamish then asked whether he could dowse Frank and Nigel, who cheerfully agreed. As Nigel was approached, the rods moved perceptibly denoting, we were told, a considerable concentration of bio-energy; but as the rods moved closer to Frank, they swung violently. Hamish remarked that he had never witnessed a bio-energy field of this magnitude surrounding anyone and suggested that Frank might be inadvertently affecting the supply voltage to the cottage.

What were we to make of this? We had embarked on a scientific investigation and were now confronted with Hamish's dowsing rods and a lengthy recitation on dangerous Earth energies. Hamish informed us that there were such things as 'negative leys', known as 'black streams', which could appear following major road works or quarrying and that these negative streams could cause havoc.

All this was far removed from the scientific explanation we were seeking for the weird events at Iverson Cottage, but we were willing to consider anything. After all, SWEB and ECRC had taken five years just to reach the conclusion that the cause of the problem lay within Iverson Cottage! The events which we had been witnessing fell into the realm of the paranormal and, although it was difficult to comprehend how any paranormal force could conjure 2000 volts onto the mains, we had at least to consider this possibility.

Following the departure of Hamish and Paul, we sat down with the Pattemores as they continued their →

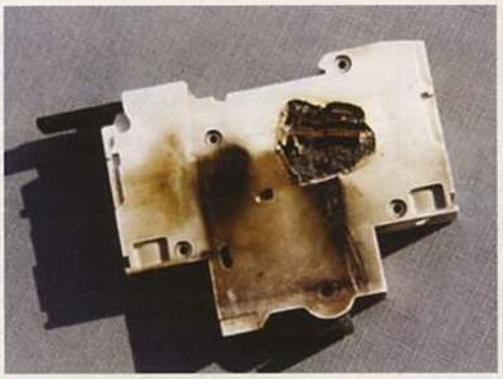
story. Frank had bought the cottage in 1976, following separation from his wife, and had enjoyed a good electrical supply until 1982 when problems began to emerge. Since then, nearly a decade had passed and, during this time, the Pattemores had endured at best a totally unreliable and dangerous installation and very often no electricity at all.

Frank emphasised that "so much has occurred in my modest terraced cottage that it would be impractical to chronicle more than a few examples". Wiring was constantly blown apart, consumer units have melted, molten metal has dropped from ceiling roses, switches have been welded and appliances, including seven TV sets, have been damaged beyond repair. Surprisingly, the phenomena were not limited to the mains; battery- powered clocks switched themselves on and off as though they had minds of their own and the telephone persistently rang of its own accord. This was a particularly strange quirk because the ringing tone sequence is generated at the exchange.

The journalist, Mike, had been using a small battery- powered tape recorder to record the Pattemores' story. It was resting on a table where it was working perfectly until Mike moved it about 25cm towards the table's edge to better record Frank's pleasant but quiet Somerset voice. It immediately switched itself off. Mike, believing the end of the tape had been reached, was about to insert a new one when it was observed that about half of the tape was still unused. It occurred to me that the recorder had been moved into the line of the strange field we had detected earlier. Moving the recorder to its original position solved the problem; we repeated this six times, using three different tapes, with the same result. The mystery deepened when the electronic flash on Brenda's camera would not function anywhere in the front room but operated perfectly outside.

On delving through a large box of burnt out cables, blown fuses, welded switches, and charred circuit breakers an interesting fact emerged: the high-voltage surges were getting into Iverson Cottage via the neutral conductor - but why weren't other properties affected in the same way? This was a perplexing and persistent problem which scuppered every hypothesis put forward; it was highlighted by the Cook Report, in which radar was considered a likely candidate for the problem but had to be ruled out because other properties, in the line of sight, should also have been affected but weren't.

Frank showed us a meticulously kept log of the number of units of energy consumed; very 24 hours; the intermittent and random recording of up to 44 units in a single period was reflected in the enormous quarterly bills which he received. This vast consumption of energy is equivalent to a three-bar electric fire burning continuously for 15 hours. It was therefore surprising that SWEB had not been concerned about this when they knew that Frank was unable to use a small 25W bulb at the same time as boiling water in an electric kettle.



ALL PHOTOS BILL LOXE

ABOVE: A small selection of damaged components from Iverson Cottage (clockwise from top left): A miniature circuit breaker with metal components melted and plastic burnt; two shots of a lamp holder – all its brass components have been melted and its springs and contacts have fallen out; ring main cable showing severe damage to outer sheath, neutral conductor insulation completely burnt off and phase conductor insulation beginning to break down

TWO MEN IN A DARK COLOURED CAR FOLLOWED NIGEL TO WORK

Towards the end of our three-day visit to Somerton we observed this massive and mysterious energy use for ourselves: with all circuits isolated and the main double-pole switch off, the meter was turning and recording a consumption of energy which was observed by six independent witnesses. This was uncanny; meters cannot record when no energy is being consumed - so *where* was this energy being used? Certainly nowhere in Iverson Cottage - but Frank was footing the bill. I discussed this with colleagues and with the meter manufacturers. All agreed that it was impossible, and yet we had witnessed it! I was determined, on leaving Somerton, to continue my research.

THE ELUSIVE MR DICKINSON

I began by writing another letter to SWEB's Mr Dickinson, asking for his comments on points that had emerged during my visit to Somerton. The reply was amazing: an unsigned, handwritten note on a plain piece of paper stating that Mr. Dickinson had retired 18 months ago.

My further correspondence with SWEB was equally bizarre: the so-called 'Capenhurst Report' was invoked time and again in an attempt to impede my investigation. The report was guarded with extreme tenacity by SWEB, who had commissioned it, to the extent that Frank's MP, Mark Robinson, was denied even a peep at its contents. There were alleged to be many reasons for its confidentiality "not least of which was the safety of Mr Pattemore himself".

The Report, dated June 1987, originating from an investigation by ECRC (Electrical Council Research Centre, which later became ERDC or Electricity Research and Development Centre) concluded that "The only consistent pattern for the reproduction of the major recent damage and failures we have found is by means that would have required very many deliberate and destructive acts within the premises"

In the Summary of Findings the report states that damage still occurred when power to Iverson Cottage was supplied by a diesel generator. ERDC say that evidence from SWEB engineers substantiates this but when, in 1991, I met Alan Bennett, the engineer responsible for the daily change from mains to generator, he told me that Frank's electrical supply was trouble free when the generator was used and later confirmed this in a signed statement.

Following deregulation, Frank had decided to have his home rewired again, but this time by SEC (Southern

BILL LOVE

ABOVE: Nigel Pattemore in the back garden of Iverson Cottage.

Electric Contracting). Within days of completion in November 1993, all the phenomena had reappeared and, once again, they were typical of those caused by high voltage surges. I asked both SWEB and SEC to monitor the voltage in Iverson Cottage. They both refused and vehemently disputed the existence of high voltage surges, although these had been abundantly clear from the beginning.

Roy Seagram, a Cambridge consultant called in by the Cook Report, stated in his report that "virtually all the incidents were compatible with high voltage pulses on the mains supply and such pulses have been observed". We had also recorded many surges in excess of 2kV.

In a letter to SWEB dated 7 April 1994 (ref. MS/JK/850377/E/94), J Krsmanovic, the District Contracts Manager at SEC, stated "It would appear from the reports attached that the probable cause of failures were excessive voltages". Martyn Stevens, the Home Improvements Manager at SEC, also confirmed, during a telephone conversation, the existence of the surges on the neutral conductor and the fact that SEC's sales rep had seen the meter recording before the tails were connected. When I asked him to confirm this in writing he declined, but following my letter telling him that our conversation had been recorded, I received a letter from Vincent O'Sullivan, Contracting Services Manager at SEC, stating that Martyn Stevens had repeated hearsay rather than making a statement of fact. The tape recording seems to tell a different story.

MEN IN BLACK FROM THE DTI

Things then took a turn for the very strange. Nigel Pattemore had reported incessant VHF interference on his radio and shortly after this he was visited by two men from the Department of Trade and Industry who listened to tape recordings of the interference. They remarked that it was encrypted computer data being transmitted at speed and asked whether they could borrow the tapes, promising to return them after they had been analysed. The tapes were never returned but, three days later, two men in a dark coloured car followed Nigel to work. This happened again on the following day, and on the third day two men, perhaps the occupants of the dark car, called at Nigel's workplace, where they searched his haversack, lunch box and sandwiches and stripped the roof lining and carpeting from his car.

Nigel was driven to Yeovil police station, under the pretext of attending a meeting concerning the electrical supply at Iverson Cottage, where he was closely questioned concerning the recording of interference with radio reception. Nigel was eventually bailed for causing criminal damage to SWEB property at his home.

During the time that Nigel was in custody, a posse of police and SWEB officials was searching Iverson Cottage, under warrant. The search was very thorough but, in the end, only a screwdriver and a soldering iron were taken away. Three days later, the charge against Nigel was dropped. No apology was offered and, within a short time, the police were denying that Nigel had ever been in custody (I am in possession of the bail sheet). SWEB said that the police initiated the search of Iverson Cottage; the police claimed that SWEB initiated it.

Two of the more sinister visitors in dark suits were Michael Chown and Robin Judd, Michael Chown spread large maps over the floor and spoke of "waves over Somerton". He left a contact telephone number that proved to be that of a garage on the A487. Robin Judd arrived unannounced and appeared to be completely familiar with all the problems at Iverson Cottage. Before he departed, he asked the way to Taunton where he said that he had a meeting with SWEB. He took an envelope, bearing the name and address of Lady Zinia Judd, from his pocket and wrote a contact telephone number on the back of it. When Frank dialled this number, he was at first told that Robin Judd was not known .He eventually spoke to someone purporting to be Robin Judd who said that he was a farmer who had only been to Somerset once to sell some sheep in a market. SWEB denied all knowledge of any meeting with Robin Judd.

Ian Sawyer, Nigel's probation officer, wrote to him to say that Robin Judd was Lady Zinia's brother-in-law and was some kind of electrical engineer. He confirmed this to me and claimed that the information came from a Special Branch friend who had also told him that Stewkley Grange, Lady Zinia's home, was used by the security services. Jamie Judd, Lady Zinia's ex-husband, has categorically stated, in two letters to me, that there is no Robin Judd in the family and that Stewkley Grange has never had any connection with special branch or the security services! So who was the elusive Robin Judd and how did he obtain a letter addressed to Lady Zinia Judd?

Further events totally unconnected with the power supply added to the mystery of Iverson Cottage. The most bizarre involved one of the many letters I wrote to Frank Pattemore. The letter was sent by first class mail in a hand-addressed envelope but, when it arrived at Iverson Cottage, my letter was missing and in its place there was a letter from David Tomlinson in Kent to Lt Col Brounlie in Dorset. The contents of the letter concerned a Festoon butterfly. Neither David Tomlinson nor Lt Col Brounlie could give an explanation. The Royal Mail, though, did have an answer – this can't happen!

And so my investigation ended; if anything, there were now more unanswered questions than when I'd first become interested in the case. Remnants of the phenomena exist to this day, but there is still no explanation for the strange events at Iverson Cottage, events inconsistent with the known laws of electromagnetism. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

BILL LOVE read physics and maths at St Andrews University before flying with the RAF as a fighter pilot towards the end of WW2. An experience during his RAF service fostered a keen interest in the paranormal. On leaving the RAF, he completed teacher training at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill and spent 23 years teaching in schools and colleges. Since leaving teaching, he has promoted the holistic way of life by writing and lecturing.

The story that crow told me...

Three warring countries' destinies are linked by ravens. Someone will have to eat crow, says JEFFREY VALLANCE

JEFFREY VALLANCE, prolific artist and simulacrum hunter, has contributed to *FT* since 1989.

Recently I moved back to the San Fernando Valley in California, where the tranquillity is broken only by the squawking of a profusion of crows. Their crowing often wakes me up with a jerk first thing in the morning. While half-awake one early morning, I thought I heard a crow on my window ledge talking to me. She cocked her head and screeched, "Jeffrey, by virtue of your Nordic heritage, you will understand what I reveal to you. Hark, the mighty warrior Göran is on a crusade to the East to kill the last dinosaur and devour its heart. This brutal deed will begin a blood-bath the likes of which the world has ne'er seen. Caw! Caw!" I awoke from my reverie and jumped out of bed. Was I dreaming, or was I stark raving mad? It seemed quite real. Was it a hypnopompic experience on the threshold of wakefulness, or a vision? What did it mean?

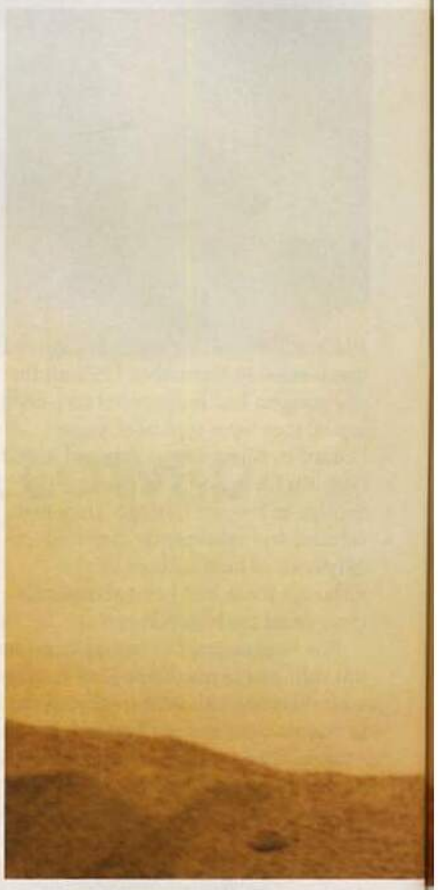
If crows are caged, they will begin to "talk" or mimic words, and can acquire vocabularies larger than those of parrots. As for talking ravens, there is Edgar Allen Poe's grim and ancient raven repeatedly uttering "Nevermore." And witches and warlocks often have raven familiars. The terms 'raven' and 'crow' are almost interchangeable, but they have a few notable differences. A crow makes a nasal, high-pitched "caw," and has over 20 distinct calls, whereas a raven utters a low, hoarse "croak" and can express itself in up to 100 different vocalisations. The scientific name for the American crow is *Corvus brachyrhynchos*, and the common raven is *Corvus corax*. Ravens are one-third larger than crows. Ravens prefer forested areas where they can feed on abundant carrion, while our omnivorous crows are more at home in the urban landscape – hence the Valley.

In mythology, the crow is one of the most common trickster figures, as well as a messenger and creator deity. Because of their jet black colour, crows and ravens have been omens of death, destruction, and spirits of divination. Both birds are associated with battlefields, execution sites and cemeteries (since they feast on human remains). The croak of the raven is a portent of death, as in *Macbeth*. Our term "croak" is likewise an expression for "passing away."

The Vikings interpreted the cries and movements of birds (ornithomancy) as a method of divining the future. Even without divination, it is said that Vikings could understand certain crow distress calls, for example the alarm call for a person approaching from a specific direction. Ravens hold prophetic knowledge of war. Similar to the valkyries, the raven is called "Chooser of the Slain," deciding which warrior must fall. Thus, a hero must be trained to understand the language of birds as a key to enter the World of the Raven (the underworld), where victory or defeat is ordained. With God's help, both King Solomon and Saint Francis of Assisi understood the language of birds. Correspondingly, the knowledge of bird language can also be attained by slaying a dragon and eating its heart.

In Nordic mythology, the chief divinity Odin has two raven familiars, Huginn ("thought") and Muninn ("memory"). Each morning, Odin sends them forth to soar over the Earth. At night, they return to perch on his shoulders and tell him what they have heard and seen. Related is the "crow's nest" on ships, a perch for lookouts to gather intelligence. In Celtic mythology, the Morrigan – who often appears as a grim, hooded crow – is the goddess of battle, strife, and fertility. She appears as both a single goddess and as a trinity. The other deities forming the trio are the goddess of war, *Badb* (crow), and *Macha* (raven).

Ravens hold prophetic knowledge of war



The goddess often assumes the form of a carrion-crow and is then referred to as *Badb Catha* (battle raven). The trio took part in battles, influencing their outcome by causing great pandemonium. The battlefield itself is often called 'land of Badb'. The Morrigan has her own end-of-the-world prophecy: "I shall not see a world which will be dear to me; summer without blossoms, cows without milk, women without modesty, men without valour, conquests without a king, forests without trees, sea without produce, false judgments of old men, false precedents of lawyers, every man a betrayer, every son a blasphemer. An evil time."

Back to my dream. I have interpreted the Valley crow's prophecy: the mighty warrior Göran is none other than Saint George reincarnated as George W Bush. According to legend, St George was an English knight on crusade to the Holy Land. In the Middle East, he

TRINETTE REED/CORBIS

encountered a dragon (or pliosaur) which he slew with the Holy Lance. His legend represents the triumph of Good over Evil. Saint George is known as the Holy Wrestler (as he wrestled with the dragon, symbol of the Devil). The patron saint of England, soldiers, and Boy Scouts, he is invoked for protection against syphilis, herpes, and predatory beasts. Like the saint of old, George Bush is on a crusade to the Middle East to kill the last dinosaur – Saddam Hussein. (It is his burning obsession, like the burning bush which is ablaze and yet not consumed.)

His act of war may ignite the Apocalypse (or in Norse mythology *Ragnarok*, the "Doom of the Gods"). Saddam fancies himself the reincarnation of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The Ishtar ("is tar") Gate, the Tower of Babel (a ziggurat), and the entire ancient citadel of Babylon were constructed of bricks mortared with asphalt (or tar, a petroleum product). In other words, Babylon was built literally of oil. Like his namesake-daddy, George W wants to slay the craven dragon and plunder (ravish) his oil. He hungers to consume the dragon's oily heart to become invincible in war. Bush has a hankering to take on the biblical dragon of Revelation.

Saddam craves to regain the glory and relics of ancient Babylon. He would like to get his hands on the Ishtar Gate, built around 600 BC by King Nebuchadnezzar (currently in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin), which has an image in bas-relief of a ravenous dragon. Ishtar is the Babylonian Goddess of War whose emblem is the raven. The Ishtar dragon is also called the Sirrush or Mushhushshu. The dragon has a slender body covered with scales, a long, tapered tail, and a serpentine neck. A reptilian forked tongue protrudes from the mouth. Curious flaps of skin are attached to the back of the serpent's head, along with a lethal horn.

Some cryptozoologists claim the Ishtar dragon was the last living dinosaur. The Babylonians penetrated deep into Africa and by chance may have captured a specimen of the Mokele-Mbembe, a huge reptile from the Congo. Accordingly, King Nebuchadnezzar may have kept this living sauropod dinosaur in the Temple of Marduk, whose symbol is the dragon.

Certain Christian creationists point to the biblical Behemoth as the dragon of Revelation. They believe that the dinosaurs did not die off millions of years ago (surviving on Noah's Ark) and may have become extinct only relatively recently. Saint George may have killed one of the last of these terrible lizards. There is some evidence that a few dinosaurs and marine reptiles could still be alive in remote areas, teetering on the verge of extinction (like some world tyrants).

As I write, the tree overhead is teeming with crows, raucously jabbering as if they know I am recording their tale. The Old Testament and the Koran label the raven an "unclean animal." The raven is a harbinger of war and doom. A flock of crows is called a "murder" of crows, from the folk belief that crows form tribunals to judge and punish delinquent crows. The US Air Force has christened the aircraft flying over the Iraqi no-fly zone "Ravens". During the Gulf War, Ravens launched from Dhahran Air Base, Saudi Arabia, patrolled the skies over southern Iraq. The EF-111A Raven built by Grumman Company is an aircraft with electronic jamming equipment and a processor to detect hostile radar emissions. About these aircraft, the spokesman for the Iraqi Air Defense Command announced: "The murderous ravens once again violated the sanctity of our national airspace. Our valiant air defences forced these dark ravens to leave our national airspace in shame and disappointment to the bases of evil and aggression."

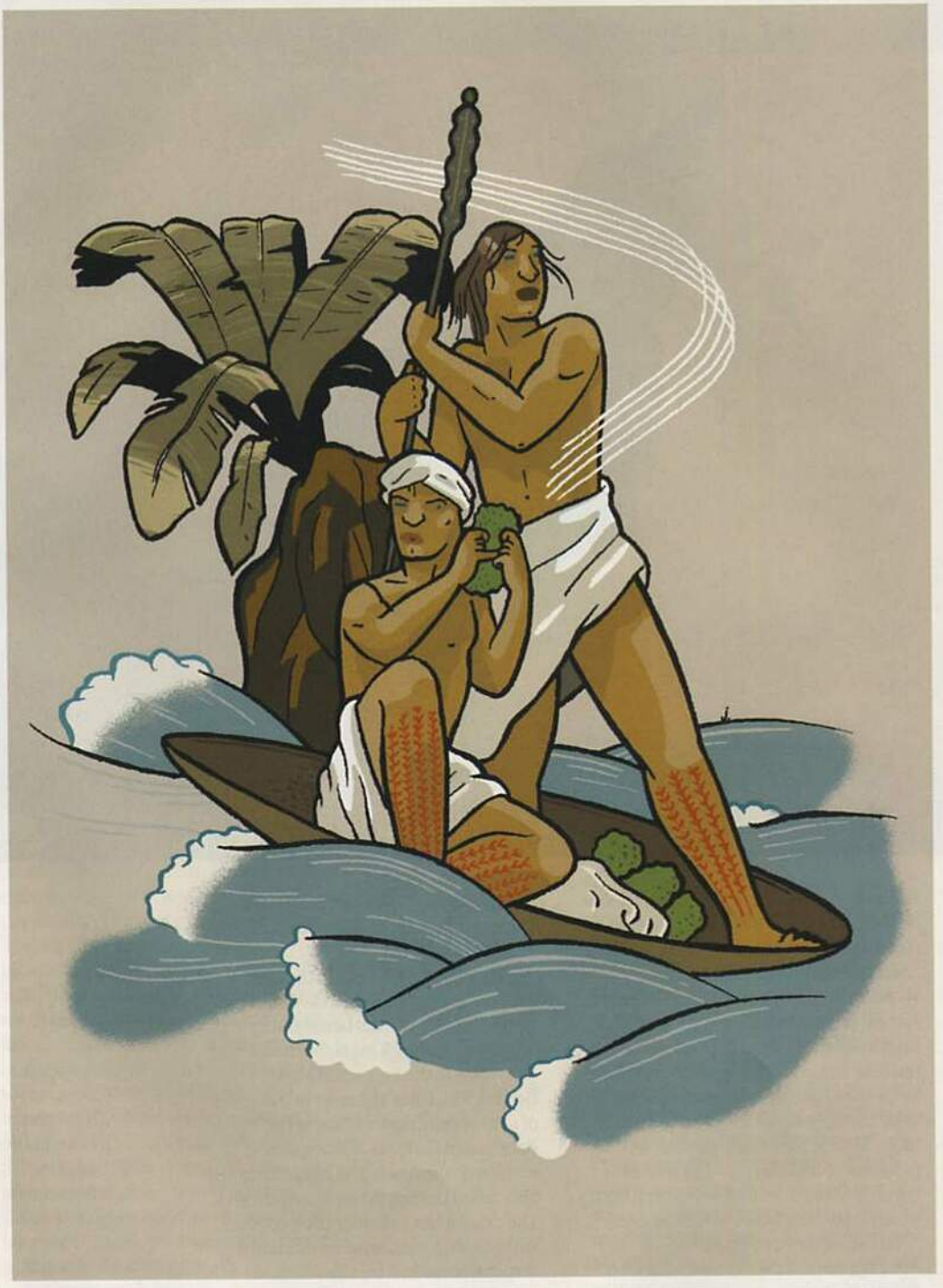
America's ally in the war against Saddam is Great Britain, a country whose destiny is likewise linked with ravens. Traditionally ravens live in the Tower of London. A curious superstition dating from the time of Charles II prophesies that when ravens no longer roost in the Tower, the kingdom will fall. In recent times, their wings are clipped so that they cannot fly away. Perhaps as a key to assured victory, the monarchy still maintains ravens to know what they have seen. A fascinating development of crow symbolism is the representation of its three raptorial claws drawn within a solar disc: the peace symbol.

As the enchanted Valley crow proclaimed, the US and Britain have been itching to storm Iraq (using intelligence gathered by Ravens) to subdue the terrible tyrant of Babylon. They want to devour his lifeblood, the oil at the heart of the Earth. Alas, this may ignite the prophetic battle, bringing doom to us all. Beware! Caw! Caw! FT

The recording sponge

WILLIAM SUTTON AND JOHN SUTTON relate the strange tale of Captain Vosterloch and the long-playing sponge

WILLIAM SUTTON is a novelist and Latin teacher who appeared in Ken Campbell's fortean epic, The Warp, and plays cricket for Brazil. **JOHN SUTTON**, author of Philosophy and Memory Traces, teaches at Macquarie University, Sydney, and presents 'Ghost in the Machine' on East Side Radio.



JAN VAN DER VEKEN

Do you sing to your sponge? Beware. If a mysterious Parisian pamphlet of 1632 [*see panel*] can be credited, your warblings may be played back the next time it is squeezed. A certain Captain Vosterloch, relates the *Courrier Véritable*, discovered a sponge used by natives of the southern seas to communicate across long distances. Simply squeeze and the message spoken into it is replayed exactly. Can a sponge record sound? Bald fact or pure fiction, the source material is as obscure as the science. But if Vosterloch did not exist, it seems a tremendous lark to have invented him. For, as myth, this fantastic portrayal of sound and porosity forces us to re-examine not only the humble sponge, but also the history of sound recording, and our notion of memory itself.

The phonographic *poriferum*, regarded as myth, takes its place in a venerable tapestry of historical science fiction. Ancient China, Greece and Egypt all produced magical devices to duplicate sound or make statues speak, involving bellows, for instance, or simply a hidden person.[1] The 1589 speaking tube of Giovanni Battista Porta prefigures the 1,000 mile speaker, a sealed wooden tube invented by Chian Shun-hsin in the 17th century.[2] Most grotesque is Rabelais's idea:[3] the death throes of soldiers who died in freezing icefields are gruesomely replayed when Spring thaws the ice. Cyrano[4] convincingly describes talking books with watch-like gears instead of pages. A needle placed on the desired chapter produces a quasi-human voice – speaking the lunar language, of course. Whereupon we remember that Cyrano also claimed to have visited the Moon.

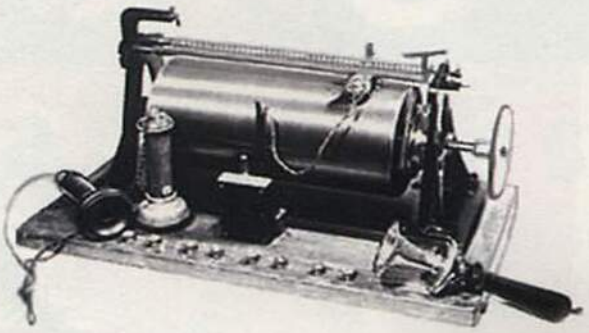
The death throes of soldiers are replayed when Spring thaws the ice

Our South Sea setting raises familiar questions about the colonial fascination with wonders.[5] Why do we project such fantasies on to the exotic other? To claim conquest of things beyond our ken, perhaps. To aggrandise our exploration, certainly. But our myth stands out from stock legendary topoi. What other exotic tale is so civilised? So pseudo-technological? So modern?

Neither terrifying like dragons nor awe-inspiring like the world's edge, the recording sponge makes its (one and only?) appearance soon after Shakespeare's Folio appears across the

channel. If printing techniques could preserve and disseminate written words and pictures too (in the form of engravings), why should speech – the most immediate form of communication – prove recalcitrant?

We know that people were already fantasising about recording sound.[6] What other technologies, besides our dicta-sponge, have been forgotten? Leonardo's helicopter is famed; but who remembers Valdemar Poulsen? At the Paris Exhibition of 1900, the Dane's answering machine was lauded for sound quality far outstripping the phonograph.[7]



ABOVE: Valdemar Poulsen's answering machine, the Telegrafoon, exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1900.

Besides its value as myth and technological barometer, our supersponge is also a historical metaphor for memory. In the struggle to account for the vagaries of remembering, such metaphors relate intriguingly to prevalent technologies. Nowadays, we draw comparisons with hard drives and their crashes, websites and their glitches. Not long ago, we talked of filing things away in the mind, like index cards in boxes and folders in cabinets. But memory has been likened to such diverse containers as the rooms of a house and the stomach of a cow.[8] If a sponge seemed a credible way to record sound, what light does that cast on 17th century neurology, psychology and journalism?

These primitive metazoa (and their synthetic counterparts) provide a familiar image for forgetting, not retaining, information.[9] Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, in name and effect, has unnervingly reinforced this folk notion. But *porifera* – a group successful since pre-Cambrian times through reproduction both sexual and asexual, viviparous and oviparous – are prized by biologists for clues they provide about the evolution of more complex systems.[10] With their extraordinary cellular structure, they also offer fruitful comparison with current models of the brain. Just as our neural pathways form and reform in a fluid evolution, so their mobile cellular systems carry out all vital functions, without developed tissue organisation.

Perhaps we should hesitate, however, before writing off the spongiform answering machine as myth or metaphor. Consider, behind fantastical sightings of sea monsters, the core phenomena of whales and giant squid. And how fanciful dragons sound... until you visit Komodo. Can any spongologists help us uncover the grain of truth in this pearl of a story? Or is it to historians of sound we should turn? Such a porous recording device requires sound to be liquid: Vosterloch saw voices soaked up, just as Rabelais imagined them freezing. What is the nature of porosity? Solid matter with holes like Swiss cheese? Or must the stuff itself be permeable? Have we been too busy scrubbing ourselves down to remember the talking *poriferum*? Think twice next time you catch yourself singing in the bath. Perhaps one day you'll buy the *White Album* again, but on long-playing sponge. FT

Who was Captain Vosterloch?

Le Courrier Véritable, April 1632
'In this land, reports Captain Vosterloch, nature has furnished men with certain sponges which retain sound and articulated speech, just as our sponges do with liquid. So that when they want to ask something, or confer at a distance, they just speak near some of these sponges, then, on receiving them, they make the words inside come out by pressing them quite gently and by this admirable means they know everything that their friends want.' [11]

LE COURRIER NOT SO VÉRITABLE?
Our sources on this proto-dictaphone quibble over every detail. For instance, de Filippis locates Vosterloch's voyage *'dans les terres australes au large du détroit de Magellan.'* Other suggestions include the South Seas, Australia and Antarctica. What is this pamphlet, lurking in the Bibliothèque Nationale Française? One-off broadsheet or regular newspaper? Anonymous or by the famed author, Charles Sorel? Draaisma says Sorel in 1632, Marty goes for 1633, but Levin states that neither author nor publisher is marked. Calling it *'une gazette satirique'* de Filippis applauds the story as appealing but unscientific, while Levin describes 'a thin little book' telling of this 'land of people with bluish-black skin which has no art and no science nor any written exchange.' Most mysterious of all, who was Captain Vosterloch? The only scrap of information – that he was a Dutch sea-captain – comes from Wojciech Waglewski, former singer of Polish band, Voo Voo.[12]

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FOOTNOTES
1 See both Marty and Gross
2 Levin
3 Rabelais, Book IV, Chapter LVI
4 Cyrano de Bergerac
5 Daston & Park
6 Draaisma
7 Levin
8 Draaisma
9 See, for example, Bob Williams: 'Please don't squeeze the brain sponge' at www.couriertribune.com/nws/squeeze2.html
10 Patricia R Bergquist: 'Porifera' at www.els.net.
11 Our translation from de Filippis
12 www.voovoo.art.pl/media/max/max_99_05.html

IRA hitman on the run

Britain's most wanted fugitive. D'oh!

Tim Burgess' guide to LA

The Charlatan's Hollywood drive-by

Soccer AM, Jeff Stelling, Andy Gray

Why Sky has the greatest football TV on earth

Oooh! Simpsons extravaganza

New season preview / Groening speaks

MAY ISSUE ON SALE NOW

reviews

Mapping a religion's shadows

The first significant book on Zarathustra for over 40 years succeeds better as a travelogue than as an illumination of Zoroastrian philosophy

In search of Zarathustra

The first prophet and the ideas that changed the world

Paul Kriwaczek

Phoenix Books, 2003.
Pb, 244pp, illus. £8.99. ISBN 1 8421655 5

Everyone has heard the name Zarathustra (a good few of them probably think his first names were Also Sprach, but that's their loss) but very few could tell you much about him, if anything. And what brought him to the attention of Nietzsche, and thus to Richard Strauss, Stanley Kubrick and finally us?

I opened this book with a real sense of anticipation: a book that promises to shed some light on Zarathustra is as rare as it's welcome. After all, despite being the founder of a major religion, and a major influence on Western religions in general, not much has been written about him – it's over 40 years since a significant work appeared in English.

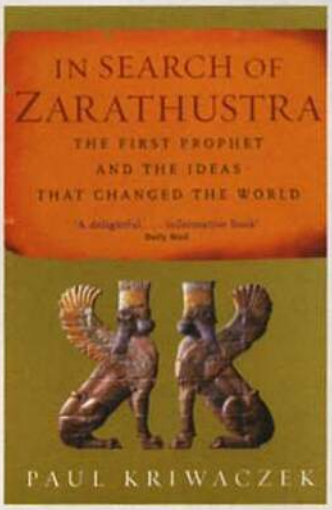
By the time I'd finished the book, I had the vague feeling I'd been subtly cheated. By some sort of atmospheric morphing I'd ended up reading a television documentary; quite a good documentary, I'll grant you, and I look forward to seeing the real thing, but that's not quite why I opened the book. I don't mean it's like one of those awful 'book of the TV series' things; this was like reading the documentary itself.

It's not that I didn't enjoy the experience at all; the book is affable enough, and there are a lot of amusing, and poignant, anecdotes, and much of the material on Iran and Afghanistan was new to me. But it was like having an after-dinner chat with someone who is quite interested in Zarathustra, but not terribly knowledgeable. The book is more emotive than informative, and much of the detail comes across as decoration; superficial in the way that many documentaries are, a series of stimulating but ultimately unsatisfying snacks.

Zoroastrianism is an intangible subject, of course, and it's a brave writer who tackles it at all. To get at its historic, mythic and legendary roots is like mapping shadows; but there are traces of it left, a surprising number of them in fact. Kriwaczek never quite gets to grips with his subject; he is unable to take us inside the philosophy of Zoroastrianism, or give us a real flavour of the historical time when it flourished. Instead he leaves us with a TV image of Zarathustra and his religion, set against a series of familiar backdrops – Cathars, Gnostics, Essenes etc – and the impressive physical remains of ancient spiritual and historical traditions.

It's like being taken on a guided tour of things vaguely to do with Zarathustra. The things that he actually left us with – eschatology, dualism, angels and djinns – get less space than the travelogue, and are in any case filtered through the familiar images of the usual suspects. It seems that Zarathustra inhabits every facet of standard European esoterica, a kind of *éminence grise* in the court of high forteana: but Kriwaczek never quite gets round to telling us why, or giving a convincing analysis of this influence, and its extraordinary reach through time.

Some of Kriwaczek's historical detail is inaccurate. For instance, the Cathars weren't Vegans, and they didn't abjure all flesh; they refused to eat the fruit of copulation, which meant that meat was out, but fish was in (after all, no one had ever seen fish fuck, whatever W C Fields says).



Zarathustra inhabits every facet of European esoterica, a kind of éminence grise in the court of high forteana

Some of it just needed more work. Mithraism is a difficult subject, but it's not quite as mysterious as Kriwaczek makes it out to be; there are some decent and informative books on its roots and practices, which he could have found (a quick look through the notes and sources suggests that the research wasn't that thorough). A look at the wealth of new work on the Sarmatians might also have helped; it might have changed Kriwaczek's version of their migratory route for instance, and tied them in better to his cursory brush with the roots of Arthurian legend.

I think the Parsees should have got their own chapter. They are practitioners of a form of Zoroastrianism, even if it is vestigial, and should have occupied at léast as much of the book as Judaism, or any of the Christian heresies. And it can't be too often you get the opportunity to write about Freddies Nietzsche and Mercury in the same book.

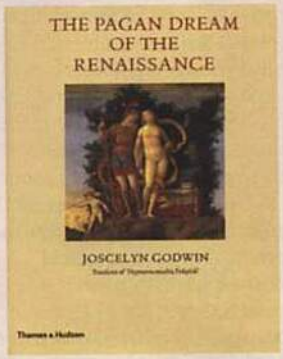
This book is by no means all weak; the chapters on Daniel, and on the sectarians of pre-rabbinic Judaism, are well-informed and detailed, and it serves as a good introduction to the traditions of Iran and Afghanistan. And if you have no idea who Zarathustra was, or what Zoroastrianism was, this is as good a place to start as any. On the minus side, it lacks real depth and insight, is determinedly eurocentric, and rarely offers anything of great substance; you might be advised to wait for the documentary.

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict
A FLAWED ACCOUNT OF A CRUCIAL RELIGIOUS FIGURE **6**

Releasing the old gods

Goodwin reveals the sexual and pagan heat, and the magic and occult learning, lurking just under the surface of Renaissance art



The pagan dream of the Renaissance

Joscelyn Godwin

Thames & Hudson, 2002
Hb, 292pp, illus, £26, ISBN 0 500 251193

Renaissance art has long been installed at the pinnacle of Western high culture, endlessly (and rightly) praised for its formal and technical perfection. But much of this commentary takes the work's neo-classical content for granted, bypassing what to many is an obvious question: why, emerging as it did from a Christian culture, is there so little Christian content in it? Its crowded mythological canvasses of gods, monsters, heroes, mythical beasts, nudes, sylphs and spirits seem rather to suggest that those who created it believed in another religion altogether. Joscelyn Godwin, scholar of both the Renaissance and hermetic occultism, suggests that this is perhaps how we should approach it. He even suggests that what we thought were elegant classical tableaux might also be something more like tantric mandalas: occult works designed according to magical schemes as portals for initiatory astral travel.

Unlike many occult writers, Godwin is unafraid of allowing the cold light of mundane context into his world – these works, he makes clear throughout, were created in a culture of conspicuous displays of wealth for, and often by, people who never had an occult thought in their heads. And unlike most Renaissance scholars, he's quite happy to concede that the endless nubile nymphs and sylphs may have the whiff of nouveau-riche soft porn about them. But his careful unpacking of the imagery and symbolism contained in the books, sculptures, canvasses, frescoes, funeral urns and bas-reliefs of the familiar palaces, galleries and gardens of the (mostly) Italian Renaissance exposes, time and again, magical schema, cosmic correspondences, kabalistic and hermetic allegories, sexual and pagan heat boiling under their graceful exteriors.

Virtually every reader will have to take some of this on faith; Godwin's combination of deep Renaissance and occult learning is probably unique. But taking it on faith is a delight. It combines its minute and painstaking examinations of symbolism with a broad and inclusive sweep – part magical key to familiar tourist destinations like the Palazzo Vecchio and the Villa d'Este, part mischievous pricking of Renaissance-studies pomposity, part lucid and convincing exposition of how the Renaissance mind worked, and why it created the worlds it did.

The Renaissance it cumulatively reveals is something far from the conventional narrative of Western art history, and far closer to a type of spiritual or cosmic art which the West is usually thought to lack. There is, as Godwin implies, an irony in the modern flight towards Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies, pantheist philosophies and art of spiritual transformation: all these are actually part of the Western cultural tradition too, but we have forgotten the keys which we need to unlock them and release the old gods.

Mike Jay

Fortean Times Verdict
PUTS THE MAGIC BACK IN HIGH CULTURE **9**

The Assassins

A radical sect in Islam

Bernard Lewis

Phoenix, 2003
Pb, £6.99, 176 pp, ind, illus, ISBN: 184212451X

First published in 1967, this is still the best and most authoritative book on the subject. Lewis (whose thoughtful preface highlights some uncomfortable contemporary parallels) is an expert on the early history of Islam.

He treats Islam with a respect born out of long familiarity, and his incisive, elegant style takes you straight to the heart of the matter. Dispelling the later accretions of myth and plain fabrication, he sets the assassins firmly in their context; an heretical sect, playing a central – and thorny – role in the shifting mosaic of Moslem power politics, and at the same time preaching a mystical, revelatory form of Islam – a radical take on the extreme fringe of shi'a practice and belief.

He explains the perplexing history of the caliphate period, and early Islamic imperialism, with a lucidity unmatched among western historians, and brings the period to life without the speculative gloss which, for too many recent writers, passes for informed interpretation.

Like his magnificent *The Arabs in History*, *The Assassins* deserves its place on the bookshelves of anyone interested in the history of Islam. After nearly 40 years, it's still fresh, insightful and entertaining. A must.

Sly Delaney

Fortean Times Verdict
EXEMPLARY HISTORY WHICH STRIPS AWAY THE MYTHS **9**

Tales from the Embassy

Dave Tomlin

Iconoclast Press, 2002
Pb, £10 (£12 inc. p+p), pp.307, no ISBN.
Order from the author at 28a Rosebush Court, 35 Parkhill Rd, London NW3 2YE. Tel: +44 (0)20 7483 1495.

In 1976, the Cambodian Embassy in St John's Wood, London, empty following Pol Pot's revolution, was occupied by squatters, who remained there for the next 15 years. Through 83 short narratives, Dave Tomlin, who pioneered the squat, sketches many of the wild characters and memorable incidents of those years. By setting up a "Guild of Transcultural

Studies" Dave and his associates invented an effective aura of respectability that was an object lesson in instant tradition, and enabled them to play host to musicians from Morocco to Pakistan, poets, prophets, exiles and refugees from many countries round the world from Chile to China.

The descriptions of periodic encounters with various arms of the diplomatic service, home-grown and oriental, are often hilarious. Above all, the embassy provided space for creative monomaniacs and radical meta-physicians to act out their visions. The *dramatis personae* are given pseudonyms, which I found mildly irritating, but for those familiar with the Guild, many of these are easy to decipher. The book offers a vivid portrait of a more leisured age which allowed eccentricity to flourish, and I think it will be read with pleasure even by those who never visited this singular establishment.

Paul Sieveking

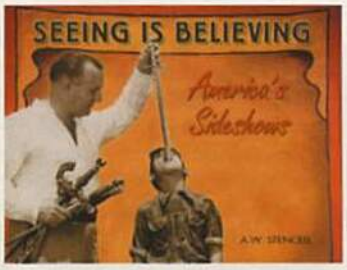
Fortean Times Verdict
OH, AMBASSADOR, YOU ARE SPOILING US... **7**

Seeing is believing

America's sideshows

A W Stencell

ECW Press, 2002
Pb, 260pp, ind, gloss, illus, $23.95/$25.95CDN, ISBN: 1 84333 599 9



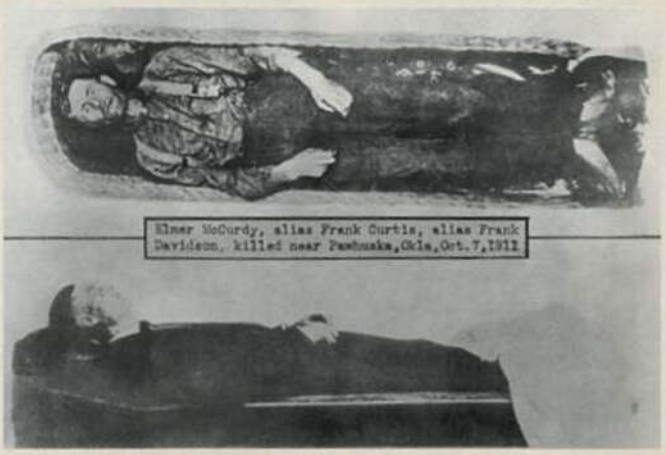
This history of American midway attractions, medicine shows and geeks – and fake freaks made of *papier mâché*, rubber and wax – from the 1870s to World War II is, I suppose, a sort of fortean coffee table book. It's a primer in Fiji Mermaids, Siamese twins, six-legged Poly-Moo-Zukes, gorilla girls, fat ladies, alligator-skinned men, talking horses, and fighting chimps from a more naïve age when men were men, women were tootsies and Afro-Americans were "jigs".

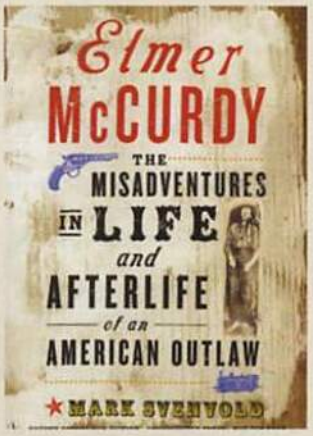
Val Stevenson

Fortean Times Verdict
PHOTOS OF A VANISHED AGE FROM A REAL ENTHUSIAST **8**

The six million dollar man

A shoot-out did not end the career of the Wild West's most inept train robber. It was just the beginning of a life on the boards...





Elmer McCurdy

The misadventures in life and afterlife of an American outlaw

Mark Svenvold

Fourth Estate, 2003
Pb, 257pp, refs, illus, ISBN: 184212451X

There can surely be very few people reading *Fortean Times* who are entirely unaware of the bizarre story of Elmer McCurdy – although most would be hard-pushed to recognise the name. He's the wild west train-robber killed in a 1911 shoot-out, whose corpse subsequently went missing and was rediscovered 65 years later, masquerading as a prop, on the set of *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Sound familiar, now? This is his full story in all its eye-goggling detail.

It begins with a 1976 murder investigation, as McCurdy's corpse – fresh from the set – is gently ripped apart on the slab of Dr Thomas Noguchi, autopsist to the stars. And in the same way, Svenvold gently dissects McCurdy's history, making no apology for the fact that he is pursuing a phantom: McCurdy is, as he says, an 'everyman', whose personality as such is unimportant. That said, the details of McCurdy that he does uncover make one wonder how he managed to survive even to the age of 31. If he's not robbing the wrong train, he's using too much explosive on a safe, melting the silver inside to the walls in one unremovable ingot. The wonder of it is that he didn't blow himself into 10,000 sticky little bits long before he was shot.

McCurdy's essential 'unknowability' would be a weakness for a less skilled writer, but Svenvold uses the silence to his advantage, making his book much more than just the story of a pathetically-inept chancer whose afterlife was as farcical as his life. For a start, it's a thoughtful examination of the status of the dead. In discussing McCurdy's posthumous showbiz career as an exhibit in travelling grind shows, it's also a gleeful study of the art of the huckster and ballyhoo merchant. It's also an American history lesson, a travelogue, and a survey of forensic detective work, and – unexpectedly – a mystery thriller, as we discover that the accepted account of McCurdy's death conceals a much uglier truth.

Svenevold's down-home style masks a shrewd and even poetic capability. Witness a court-room episode discussing McCurdy's inspired improvisation (he claimed, successfully, that a safe-cracker's kit was actually components for a new machine-gun tripod that he intended to patent). Svenvold (mentioning a Wright Brothers aeroplane soaring like a 'grace note' in the background of a 1910 newspaper advert) refers to a contemporary spirit of invention which had darted its way into McCurdy's jail cell "like a beam of mirror-bent sunlight twisting its way into the heart of an Egyptian tomb". The phrase is immediately evocative of primitiveness, discovery, desert heat. It also reminds us – with shocking subtlety – that we are considering a man's preserved corpse, plundered and ogled at as a sideshow exhibit. Moments such as these add considerable zest to an already fascinating subject.

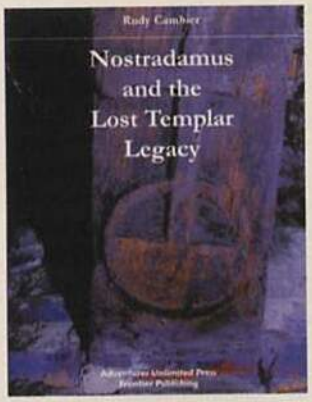
A few (very few) episodes rather strain the reader's patience. A prolonged perigrination concerning a trans-American marathon foot-race (with McCurdy's body as an exhibit in the accompanying carnival), outlives its welcome by several pages. But generally, this is a delight of a book. Contrary to the old saying, dead men do tell tales. And McCurdy's is one of the best.

Garrick Alder

Fortean Times Verdict
ADD THIS ONE TO YOUR 'WANTED' LIST **8**

Rewriting history

The translator and scholar who found the Templar's treasure spills the beans...



Nostradamus and the lost Templar legacy

Rudy Cambier

Adventures Unlimited Press Frontier Publishing, 2002
PB, 188 PP, illus, £11.99, ISBN: 1 931882 11 8

I read this book twice. Nostradmus: impenetrable (but still widely read) prophet of the future, whose name in your title guarantees sales. The Knights Templar: a mysterious group of warrior monks, apparently with hidden treasure for good measure. Their name also guarantees sales.

So, two guaranteed sellers in the title: is this why I read the book twice? No. I read it twice because I couldn't believe what I was reading.

Every fortean knows Nostradamus wrote his cryptic quatrains in the 16th century and that the Templars were dissolved at the start of the 14th century. Apparently, not everything we think we know is true. According to Cambier, the Templar dissolution still holds, but Nostradamus is out of the picture, nothing more than a common thief and a hack. The quatrains were really written in the 14th century by a monk to show the Templars where he had hidden their treasure – when they return, that is. But they didn't return, and no one claimed the treasure. Enter Nostradamus. He found the prophecies in a monastery, stole the book and published them as his own and thus, single-handedly, started a whole publishing industry. Or so it seems. Correctly translated (and Cambier is the first person since they were written to do it), they reveal the treasure's location.

Cambier gives only vague hints about where the treasure actually is, but this is more than he gives about the identity of the author. Yves de Lessines, a Cistercian monk, composed the prophecies between 1323 and 1328. Apparently. And this is why I read the book twice. I can't believe a statement such as this is given without any supporting evidence. I thought I must have missed a page or two. So I read it again. Nope, no evidence. Stated as fact, as if every person knows it from birth. And that's the biggest problem with this book. No evidence. No notes. No index, no bibliography, no nothing, other than the writer's outspoken beliefs. Cambier is, apparently, an expert on the dialect of French used by the monk. Knowing it's not 16th century French opens up whole new (multiple) levels of meaning.

You read the book and you have to take Cambier's word for everything. And I'm sorry, but if you want to throw an idea of this level into the public melting pot, you need to back it all up with evidence. In the book he doesn't find the treasure. I subsequently found out that he has now found it and has bought the house built over it. He's had ground-penetrating radar check it all out and he's located the barrels full of the Templar treasure. But, unfortunately, the authorities won't let him dig it up.

I read this book twice and I still can't believe it.

Gordon Rutter

Fortean Times Verdict
NEVER MIND THE MONEY: SHOW ME THE EVIDENCE **2**

Demons

The Devil, possession and exorcism

Anthony Finlay

Vega, 2002
Pb, 256pp, Appendices, Bibliography, Index, £14.99, ISBN: 1-84333-599-9

For whatever reasons, and in many very different ways, there are a lot of people out there – some of them intelligent, rational people – who not only believe in demons, but have experience of exorcism, who have dealt with people who claim to be possessed, or who believe they have been possessed themselves.

Finlay is a former Catholic priest who has performed many exorcisms. Much of *Demons: The Devil, Possession and Exorcism* explores the development of belief in demons, devils, and the Devil over the centuries.

This would be a valuable survey, except that the book is full of unsubstantiated, factually incorrect or just plain stupid generalisations such as "During this era [i.e. after the Reformation] it is no exaggeration to say that daily life in Europe lay under the influence of two opposing religions: Christianity and Satanism", "The Continent, especially France, was a hotbed of Satanism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries", "[Homage to the Devil] is alive and well today but secretly so, in several obscure sects and cults," "Many of these [Satanic] cults have child abuse as one of their main practices," and "Brain-washing is par for the course, by means of which adherents are turned into automatons obeying blindly."

In other words, this is an author who writes from his preconceptions and prejudices, without bothering to research the facts thoroughly. His bibliography, for example, includes controversial London therapist Valerie Sinason, well-known proponent of Satanic Ritual Abuse, but not anthropologist Jean LaFontaine, who comprehensively disproved it. He gives special mention to Montague Summers, one of the least reliable sources on witchcraft and related subjects, but doesn't have Keith Thomas's classic historical study on religion and magic, or more recent works such as Robin Briggs' *Witches and Neighbours* or Gareth Medway's *Lure of the Sinister*.

His appendices usefully include extracts from the Roman Catholic rite of exorcism, and questions used in witch interrogation c.1500 – "Where did you consummate your union with your incubus? What is the ointment with which you rub your broomstick made of? What plagues of vermin and caterpillars have you created?" – though without identifying the source of this wonderful list. In fact, most of his assertions and anecdotes, and even some of his quotations, are unsourced, which hardly adds to trust in the book's reliability.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
UNSCHOLARLY, INCONSISTENT AND POORLY-WRITTEN **3**

The white flag principle

How to lose a war (and why)

Shimon Tzabar

Four Walls eight Windows, 2003
Pb, 179pp, ind, bib, notes, illus, $14.95, ISBN 1 56858 259 5

Sun Tsu suggested "When at your zenith of strength, feign weakness", but he did not develop this idea with Tzabar's gleeful enthusiasm. It will annoy people who think "It matters not who won or lost,/ But how you played the game". Tzabar, a former terrorist, is clear: victory's not all it's cracked up to be – winning is for losers. History is on his side.

You cannot rely on inefficiency (your enemy, heaven forbid, might be even more hopeless), so he provides that practical advice on coming second. In case the worst happens, there's a chapter on 'How to recover from an accidental victory': for the best-case scenario, there's a chapter on surrendering. Other chapters concentrate on the run-up to war: how to manage a bad foreign policy and ruin a flourishing economy; how to splinter a united society; building your army up for defeat; and – importantly – tactics.

If you find von Clausewitz and Sun Tsu dry, try this book. This is as good a time as any to develop an interest in military strategy.

Val Stevenson

Fortean Times Verdict
MILITARY INTELLIGENCE. TO THE LOSER, THE SPOILS. **9**

Descent to Byworth

John T Freeman

Falling Leaves, 2002 (available from 020 8374 4585 or fallingleaves@blueyonder.com)
Pb, 64pp, £10, ISBN: 0 9521436 6 6

This is a delightful, dark and funny little book by artist John T Freeman, a skewed, surreal distillation of his experiences as an urban artist uprooted from the squalor of 1980s Brixton and exiled to West Sussex for a three-month sojourn in the country.

Freeman's etchings and oils are wonderful things, capturing an off-kilter, uneasy beauty in the landscapes he records – black ponds, rain squalls, road kill on the A283, dark shapes looming out of the night. There's a visionary, neo-Romantic quality to them, evoking the darker works of Sutherland or Piper, but also the sense of an outsider's perspective on a traditional genre.

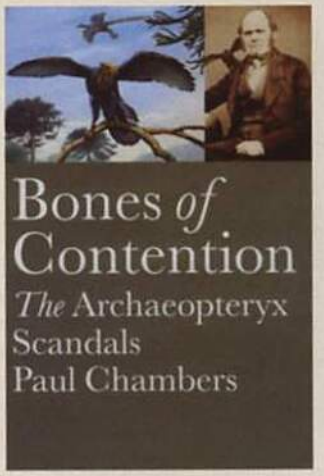
The accompanying text, playing off the paintings in an oblique fashion, is both disturbing and hilarious; visionary experiences alternate with the snail's-pace oddities of village life, trips to the dole office and mounting paranoia induced by a vanishing baking tray of roast potatoes and some UFOs. Wonderful.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
A SORT OF PAINTERLY WITHNAIL AND I – BRILLIANT **10**

Is it a bird? Is it a fake?

The Archæopteryx, the most cherished and disputed object in science, is still dividing opinion a century after it was dismissed as a fake.



Bones of contention

The Archæopteryx scandals

Paul Chambers

John Murray, 2002
Hb, 270pp, ind, refs, illus, £17.99, ISBN 0 7195 6054 3

Archæopteryx, the *urvogel* or first bird, is best known to forteans because of Hoyle and Wickramasinghe's assertion that it's a fake constructed by anti-Darwinian Victorians. In reality, Archæopteryx (known from seven specimens, the newest of which was discovered in 1992) is a theropod dinosaur that shares innumerable features with both Velociraptor and kin as well as with definitive birds. More importantly, it is perhaps the ultimate iconographic representation of evolution in the fossil record and consequently one of the best known, most valuable, cherished and argued-over objects in the entire history of science. Even in 2002 debate continued over its species-level taxonomy, correct name, anatomy, and position in the dinosaur-bird family tree.

The story of the urvogel's discovery and of the debates that surrounded it are well recounted here as Paul Chambers, an

The Archæopteryx was never implicated in episodes of sex or political intrigue

experienced palæontologist, avoids the mistakes and romanticisation prevalent in other retellings. When Archæopteryx was first announced in 1860, it was into a world in which Darwin's theory was deemed contentious or rejectable. Consequently, Archæopteryx was deliberately misinterpreted as an aberrant pterodactyl-like reptile or a modern-type bird by those with other agendas. Furthermore, as the two original specimens were obtained by private collectors, it took much wrangling and money to get them into museums (those of London and Berlin respectively). The role that the urvogel played in bird origin theories old and new and the discredited idea that it was a fake are also discussed. While Chambers favours the theory that birds are theropod dinosaurs, he places too much emphasis on the vocal minority opposed to this view and is not critical enough of their assorted erroneous claims. Consequently I feel the lay-reader might be misled as to what the current consensus view on Archæopteryx really is.

Similarly, several debates are mis-characterised or depicted as being more polarised than they really are. For example, Chambers implies that Protoavis, an alleged bird 60 million years older than Archæopteryx, contradicts the dinosaurian affinity of birds. It doesn't, even if you believe it is a bird. Chambers is also wrong in stating that all ornithologists are opposed to a dinosaurian origin of birds and in portraying the discussion of the origin of flight as being divided into 'trees down' and 'ground up' camps. Caudipteryx is always misspelt Caudopteyx.

Finally, I hope that the book's thoroughly unoriginal title was the invention of someone at the publishing company and not of the author. As for 'The Archæopteryx Scandals'... sadly, the urvogel never was implicated in any episodes of sex, debauchery or political intrigue. Indeed, one gets the impression that the author combed the literature for tales of controversy and adversity in the study of Mesozoic birds and then tried his damnedest to connect these to Archæopteryx, however tenuous the link. Cases in point are his chapters on the Cope-Marsh feud and on the recent Archæoraptor ('Piltdown bird') fiasco, neither of which have anything to do with the urvogel.

Bones of Contention is a fun read and an accurate summary of the history of Archæopteryx. Some sections will be familiar to those who have read Shipman's *Taking Wing* or any biographical work on Wagner, Owen and Huxley and criticisms might be that some key characters go unmentioned and that the treatment is rather anglocentric. It's far from a synthesis on Archæopteryx (not that it was intended to be) and it's a bit weak in misrepresenting some of the technical aspects of contemporary work (those interested should follow it up with Greg Paul's *Dinosaurs of the Air*). Overall, though, it's a nice little book.

Darren Naish

Fortean Times Verdict
NICE HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE MOST FAMOUS FOSSIL **7**

Cinema

Big chills and bad dreams

Kasdan loses King's plot – and the result is pretty strange...

Dreamcatcher

Dir Lawrence Kasdan, USA, 2003

Whenever Stephen King puts pen to paper, it's a dead-cert that the result will be made into a film at some point. However, the quality of the end-product tends to vary alarmingly. For every *Shawshank Redemption* there's a *Tommyknockers*, for every *Misery*, a *Children of the Corn*. This effort falls somewhere in the middle.

The story centres around four men on their annual hunting trip. Each of them is facing a different personal crisis: Jonesy (Damian Lewis) is suffering from bizarre premonitions, Beav (Jason Lee) is having woman-trouble, Pete (Timothy Olyphant) is an alcoholic and Henry (Thomas Jane) is on the verge of suicide.

The strong bond they share revolves around a mysterious, mentally retarded boy called Duddits who, as kids, they saved from humiliation; in return, Duddits gave each of them a telepathic talent and became the quartet's 'Dreamcatcher', protecting them from whatever nightmares they face.

The film shifts into a disjointed second half

The film's first hour comes on like a slightly surreal version of Kasdan's own *The Big Chill*, with nice ensemble playing from the four leads, numerous hints of weirdness and flashbacks evoking King's own *Stand by Me*.

The turning point comes when a stranger appears at the friends' backwoods retreat looking for help; if his appalling flatulence isn't troubling enough, he also sports a strange red rash on his face. This turns out to be an alien life form called the Byrus, and pretty soon the entire area is quarantined by the near-psychopathic Colonel Curtis (a below-par Morgan Freeman) and his secret army. With Freeman's arrival, the film shifts into a more disjointed and unsatisfying second half, with a climax that takes massive liberties with the original story.

There are certainly things to enjoy here– the splendid cinematography, the fairy-tale atmosphere of a snow-covered forest full of fleeing racoons and rabbits, nice performances from Lewis and Lee, and a toilet-set sequence that mines both horror and humour for all they're worth.

Sometimes, though, it's not easy to tell whether the film is intentionally funny or if it's just down to William Goldman's clunky script. Anyone who has read King's original will be disappointed, but those that haven't could do worse than to see this.

James Thorley

Fortean Times Verdict

A MOVIE OF TWO HALVES – ONE OF WHICH IS GOOD **6**

The Core

Dir John Amiel, USA 2003

Somewhere between pitch and wrap, this movie sustained a fatal wound to its plot. What seemed like a great idea – the earth's core has stopped spinning and the heroic team must travel to the heart of the planet to kick-start it again – just drained away.

Anyone who loves B-movie SF (as I do) will recognise the salad of set pieces ripped from its obvious ancestors – *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* and *Fantastic Voyage* to name but two. I realised I missed the likes of dear old Doug McClure and Peter Cushing romping around a Hollow Earth, but none of that here; just endless tunnelling through magma with an improbably speedy laser-driller.

The high point comes at the very beginning, when the central character waves a copy of *Fortean Times* and cites our coverage of strange animal behaviour. Hooray for that at least!

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

THE HIGHLIGHT IS A MENTION OF FT – THE REST IS UTTERLY FORGETTABLE **3**

DVD ROUND-UP

It's good to see a DVD release for Ken Loach's unexpected foray into the realm of conspiracy theory, ***Hidden Agenda (1990, MGM, £15.99)***. This Jim Allen-scripted tale of a renegade Psi-Ops agent, a murdered journalist and high-level cover-ups in Northern Ireland features the considerable talents of Brian Cox and Frances McDormand; hardly typical Loach, but it's a minor gem of the genre.

Fans of Asian cinema will love ***Bichunmoo: Warrior of Virtue (2000, Anchor Bay, £19.99)***, a Korean epic set in 16th-century China and boasting sumptuous visuals, magnificent fight sequences and an appealing pair of star-crossed lovers. Its endless climaxes can be a bit exhausting, and some unfortunate cuts mean that chunks of key story information are confusingly absent, but this is still a lot of fun.

Two releases from Federico Fellini's back catalogue – although very much from the maestro's self-indulgent late period – are also recommended. ***Satyricon (1969, MGM, £15.99)***, loosely adapted from Petronius, marries striking set design to a bawdy evocation of Nero's Rome, while ***Roma (1972, MGM, £15.99)*** is perhaps Fellini's best effort of the 1970s – a surreal, magical and visually stunning biography of the director and the great city itself. Fabulous.

David Sutton

Devil May Cry 2

PS2, Capcom, £39.99

With its muddy screens, lame story, terrible dialogue and an irritatingly capricious camera that changes angles when you least expect it, playing *Devil May Cry 2* feels like being forced to read a particularly ropey Japanese 'Graphic Novel' while, in the backgrounds, a DJ-from-hell mixes Mahlerian strings and thumping metal-lite as his idea of an appropriate soundtrack. The two lead characters are also spookily reminiscent of Posh and Becks.

RC Samson

Fortean Times Verdict
NOISY. EMPTY. DUMB. **3**

Grom

PC, CDV/Rebelmind, £29.99

Tibet, 1942: one of Hitler's special units is searching for the Lost City of Arjuna, planning to use the legendary weapons concealed there against the Allies. As Col Grom, a tough Polish soldier, you must try to foil the Nazis' plot. Sadly, the promise of this unusual fortean scenario is squandered in a game marked by ugly graphics, clumsy and counter-intuitive gameplay, and a script that rarely makes sense. A real shame.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
MISBEGOTTEN, NOT TO SAY MISTRANSLATED, MESS **3**

Ultima Online: The Age of Shadows

PC, EA Games, £29.99

In an era when innovative on-line games come thick and fast, the game makers face two big problems (apart from ensuring good gameplay): finding some new gimmick and how to get their existing customers to pay up again. Through the early years of computer gaming, the *Ultima* series set the standard for role-playing fantasy; they were truly innovative, with great visual style, plot detail and addictive gameplay. But the real world has moved on and the on-line version of the fantasy universe of Britannia now seems a bit clunky and dated.

This add-on to the existing Internet-based game introduces a whole new land called Malas, a new combat system, a limited range of character-professions but an expanded system of character development, crafting and magic. The installation also offers 2D and 3D versions for those who have good graphics cards or not; but take note, the 3D version still appears flat and two dimensional compared with the true 3D of games like *Everquest*, *Dark Age of Camelot* and *Neverwinter Nights*. While this will be exactly what the existing fan-base wants, it will do little to attract players from the more sophisticated games they are already playing.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
ONE FOR THE FANS – BUT SHOWING ITS AGE NOW **5**

Jung at heart...

Primal is that rare thing, a console game that cares about good storytelling

Primal

PS2, Sony/Cambridge Studios, £39.99

Synchronicity seems to be present throughout this issue of *FT*; even the month's best game is full of decidedly Jungian elements.

Primal tells the story of a feisty young rock-chick called Jennifer Tate whose boyfriend is whacked by demons outside a New York nightclub. Waking up in hospital and undergoing an OOBE, she's greeted by an amiable gargoyle, Scree, who whisks her off to the realm of Oblivion and a place called the Nexus – the hub of the Cosmos where the forces of Order and Chaos are kept in a precarious state of balance. It turns out, of course, that Jen is not just an ordinary girl, but the one person who can help restore the cosmic equilibrium threatened by an eruption of chaotic elements. What this involves is journeying through Oblivion's four realms and putting things right again.

The plot may be that of a pretty typical fantasy-adventure game (or a Clive Barker novel), but *Primal's* achievement lies in its handling of such standard fare; this is a truly classy piece of work. It's visually impressive, with gorgeous lighting and textures, the seamless cut-scenes are directed with real skill, the voice-actors can act (!!), and the script is pretty good. The key is simple - good storytelling (that little something that so many titles never get to grips with), and with its warm, likeable, characters and coherent, but varied world, *Primal's* narrative is as captivating as a classic fairy tale (with a healthy dose of *Buffy* mixed in).

And what about Jung?. Well, Jen's astral journey through the myth-charged realms of Oblivion is equally a journey of self-discovery (or individuation) in which she comes to understand her own being by assimilating a number of daimonic archetypes and wielding their powers (does Jung's definition of archetypes as "primordial ideas" prefigure the game's title?); balance (a key Jungian concept) has to be restored on both a cosmic scale and at the level of the individual psyche; and Jen's companion, of course, is that familiar archetype from fairytales the world over, the guide or 'wise old man' – in this case, a cross between a gargoyle and Hollywood's idea of an English butler. While the game's highly-scripted nature and limited freedom in gameplay yields a very linear experience, the narrative confidence, the 'ooh'-factor of the visuals and the warmth of the main characters make it a wonderfully enjoyable one.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
GOOD-LOOKING BLOCKBUSTER WITH A HEART AND A BRAIN **9**

Competition

Thanks to Sony, we have a copy of Primal and a bag of assorted goodies to give away to the reader who can tell us:

Which of Jung's archetypal figures often appears in myth as a coyote?

Two runners-up will receive Primal goodie-bags, containing T-shirts, posters, CDs, mugs and more.

Answers on a postcard to: 'FT171 PRIMAL COMPETITION', FREEPOST (SWB 1446), Patchway, Bristol, BS32 0ZZ or by email to: forteantimes@cisubs.co.uk with 'FT171 Primal comp' as the subject line by 30 July 2003

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YES - AN ARMADILLO! IN STAFFORDSHIRE!
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SUBSEQUENT INVESTIGATION PROVED THAT THE "ARMADILLO" WAS IN FACT A BLACK PLASTIC RUBBISH BAG! BUT THAT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING...
IN THE SKIES OVER TURKEY--A MILITARY JET FIGHTER...
GILBERT ONE-NINE! GILBERT ONE-NINE TO BASE! I AM SEEING AN UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT! I REPEAT - A UFO! BLACK IN COLOUR, IT'S--- OH NO! IT'S....
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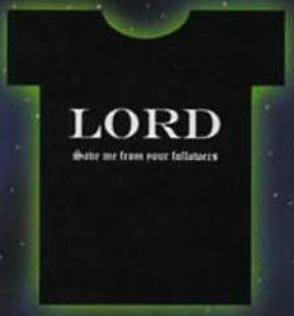

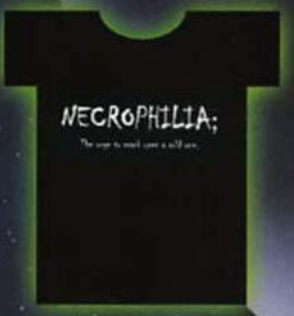

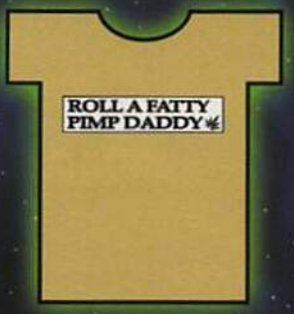

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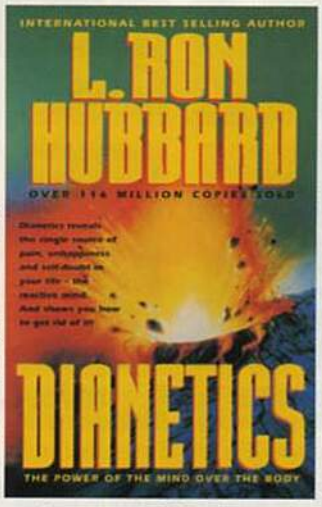
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Dear FT...

letters

Solar illusion?

After reading your request [*FT162:55*] for commentaries on the 'spinning sun' witnessed at Fatima in 1917, I came across the following extract. It is taken from *Coincidence: A Matter of Chance – or Synchronicity* compiled by Brian Inglis (Hutchinson 1990 – ISBN 0 09 174160 2).

"In 1981 Guy Lyon Playfair – author of, among other books, *If This Be Magic*, a survey of the evidence for the mind's power in healing – had a striking example of serendipity, when he was researching events at Fatima, in Portugal, in 1917, where tens of thousands of people believed they had seen the sun burst through the clouds and go round in zigzag circles: 'the most colossal miracle in history', a Jesuit had called it.

"After consulting the relevant papers in the British Library's newspaper repository in Colindale, Playfair was in the canteen having a sandwich and looking up at the clouds racing through the sky when suddenly they parted, and the sun came out through at least three cloud layers, its rays causing bright spots on their edges.

"'The lower cloud layer was moving faster than the upper ones, and for one or two seconds bright spots moved from one edge of the gap above to the other, giving a striking impression of a zigzag motion of the sun – a feature common to the many eyewitness accounts at Fatima. Seen through moving clouds, I found, it is the sun and not the clouds that appears to move, as it appears after each occultation. The whole sighting took place slap in the middle of my vision and the timing was exactly right. A few minutes earlier, and my attention would have been on my food and drink. A minute later and I would have been on my way home.'

"It is ironical, Playfair thinks, that what could be regarded as a debunking of the Fatima 'miracle', and in itself was an entirely natural phenomenon, 'gave the impression that it took place when and where it did solely for my benefit. It taught me that if one applies the mind to a specific problem with enough determination, the solution is likely to appear, sometimes in the least expected ways'."

Although this sighting is by no means as impressive as that seen by Julia Burns [*FT162:55*], I would tend to agree with Playfair that such sightings are simply optical illusions caused by unusual but perfectly natural atmospheric conditions. They may not even be unusual, just rarely reported because they go unnoticed. In fact, seeing the sun at all in this part of the world is a minor miracle in itself.

Susan Bulmer
Hebburn, Tyne & Wear

Lunacy

Colin Bennett's article "Bad Moon Rising" [*FT168:32–38*] is almost entirely waffle. In the first paragraph, he tells us that NASA hired James Oberg to write a book. The only other relevant information presented over the next five pages is that NASA cancelled the commission "within days" (the project was in the works for several months according to Oberg), but that it is now discussing salvaging the project in some form. Bennett spends most of the rest of the article complaining about spin and poking NASA with a stick. In fact, the single page from Oberg himself contains far more hard information about the situation, including the all-important explanation for why the project was cancelled.

Alex Fox
By email

Bennett criticises "cultural denials", offensively comparing NASA's claims with those of far-right Holocaust deniers. NASA's claims (as your own side panels make clear) are solid; it is those who claim that the Moon landings were a hoax who have a case to prove. Something like 400,000 people were employed by NASA and its subcontractors on Project Apollo. The fact that a tiny minority of employees were German is irrelevant.

Bennett suggests that "American rocketry was born of subsidised and cosseted Nazism" and that "von Braun looked good on TV, and that, in modern society, is what counts". In point of fact, von Braun and his German colleagues were for years deliberately kept away from the American space effort, and were only brought in after it became clear that their expertise was needed if the US were to catch up with the USSR.

Alex Swanson
Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire

On the rare occasions when Bennett includes a few scraps of information, it's often incorrect. Doesn't he ever do any research? His claim that commissioning Oberg's book was a first for NASA seems to form the cornerstone of his article – but it's completely wrong. Under its education brief, NASA has been involved in commercial publishing for decades. Amazon.com has 16 NASA-published books on sale and over 80 publications on the history of space travel alone are listed on NASA's website. Hardly "an area in which it had little or no experience" or "trying to dip its toes into the surreal software of media and public relations".

Phil Hide
Kingswood, Buckinghamshire

One small punch for buzz...
I am firmly of the belief that Buzz Aldrin was part of a major conspiracy involving clever photographic faking and in actual fact never ever landed a punch on Bart Sibrel's chin [*FT168:4*]. Apart from the rather blurry still on your leader page and a very shaky three-second clip of video footage on one website, I have been unable to find any photographic evidence that the punch ever landed. Furthermore, the Los Angeles authorities are denying that anything ever happened, and who could fail to believe the LAPD? I can draw no other conclusion than a conspiracy on the part of Mr Sibrel in his deluded attempts to prove that you can fool some of the people all of the time. One small punch for Buzz, one giant wish that we could have done it too.

Alan Fleming
Liverpool

Simulacra Corner

This sweet potato impersonating a swan was photographed by Fran Halsall of Buxton, Derbyshire.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the post box address at the top of the page (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll pay a tenner or 20 dollars for any we use.

letters

A broad church

As the person who chaired Colin Bennett's talk on scepticism at UnCon 2002, I'd like to make a couple of brief points in response to Robert Newman's letter [*FT169:53*]. While he says, quite accurately, that some people walked out of Colin Bennett's presentation and others greeted it with laughter, I have to state that there was also a certain amount of unseemly and, indeed, inarticulate heckling. This came, as far as I can remember, from one individual – whether or not this was Mr Newman himself I have no idea – and took the form of a number of shouted, rude and definitely inarticulate interruptions. When given the opportunity to ask questions, he took no advantage of the offer – which left me with the distinct impression that he had, in fact, nothing to say. Perhaps he should, like some others, have simply voted with his feet.

Everyone is entitled to his or her opinions (including, I'd hope, Mr Bennett), but plain rudeness is not acceptable during a speaker's talk and does not constitute any form of debate. Forteana is a very broad church; I hope we can accommodate a greater breadth of opinion, and extend a greater toleration to outright heresy, than do certain others.

David Sutton
London

Dog theft rumour

Recently [5 January], notices about dog theft have been appearing around the Essex town of Epping. The notices refer to an alleged spate of dog thefts in the area and have many of the hallmarks of an urban panic. The text of the notices reads as follows:

"WARNING! Dogs being stolen in this area. Please be extra vigilent [*sic*]. Do not leave dogs unattended outside shops/schools/in gardens/in cars. Remove all "advert" stickers from cars/houses that you own a dog. Ensure your property is locked at all times when unoccupied, particularly ground floor level. The thieves "mark" the property as a potential target – look out for anything which could indicate this, i.e. chalk marks etc. Be aware of any vehicles/people which are suspicious. Report anything suspicious to the police."

This is, of course, a rather strange notice. Why would thieves need to mark property? Surely they can just remember it, or write the address down in a notebook. And anyway, why would they break into property to steal dogs? Wouldn't it be easier to simply steal from the houses and buy dogs? In fact, there is little evidence that dogs have been stolen.

A local newspaper, the *Waltham Forest Guardian*, carried a story last October claiming that dogs were being stolen in the area by a gang wishing to claim rewards for returning the animals, but the story is absurdly vague, unable to name any instances of the crime, witnesses, or even "friends of friends". There seems to be no other press information. Do *FT* readers know anything about this?

Jacob Middleton
Harlow, Essex

Log monster

This classic 'lake monster' was spotted at Belper in Derbyshire in the summer of 2002. You can see its small serpentine head, then two brown mottled humps and evidence of a 'v'-shaped wake. Sceptics might say it was just a partly submerged log...
David Lowe, Kirkby in Ashfield, Notts

Not a kingfisher

The report that Peter Beese watched "a kingfisher with a massive eel" in his back garden in Gwent prior to an ABC sighting [*FT167:36*] is surely mistaken. Kingfishers, as surely everyone knows, are tiny, darting, iridescent predators of tiny (3–4in/8–10cm) fish from surface or shallow waters. They'd never hunt bottom-dwelling eels, fearing the eel slime would smear and make useless their feathers or foul up their beaks, and certainly would never attempt to capture a large eel; they wouldn't be able to lift or eat it, and there's more chance of the eel swallowing the kingfisher!

However, a heron most certainly would, as eels are its favourite prey. But the heron is a large, grey, raucous bird and no way could be misidentified as a kingfisher, having completely different predatory habits, apart from the massive difference in size and coloration.

Alan Gardiner
Burgess Hill, W Sussex

Perils of copy editing

Christopher Fisher [*FT168:52*] quite correctly points out that "NEA Telephoto" distributed other photographs besides that of the "white pyramid" and the "Roswell weather balloon", and suggests that I was implying something mysterious was afoot in my article on Chinese pyramids [*FT164:28-36*].

This particular paragraph was cut during editing. The original contained the further remark: "This is just a curiosity; the agency seems to have been quite legitimate. NEA stands for 'Newspaper Enterprise Association' and I later discovered they had distributed the first photo of the Wright brothers' flying machine in flight."

I intended to imply no mystery, merely to point out my sense of amusement upon doing my first websearch for the agency, carried out over a year ago now. The fact that the only other photograph to turn up at that time was that of the Roswell weather balloon, coincidentally a 1947 photograph, initially gave me pause for thought, which was resolved later upon further research.

Steve Marshall
By email

Sheepigs

The woolly pigs pictured in the 1934 photograph [*FT168:54*] are Mangalitzas, an ancient breed from the area of Austria-Hungary. At one time their meat products were in demand all over Europe to such an extent that they were traded on the Vienna Stock Exchange and 100,000 animals a year were sold to the West by Hungary. They have been largely superseded by English breeds, which are more suited to intensive rearing.

John Rawlinson
Reading, Berkshire

I sent the picture of the woolly pigs to my friend Mirko Voznjak in Belgrade, who is originally from Novi Sad, where the animals were photographed. He says that they are of the Mangalitsa breed, so called as they are thought to be originally from Mongolia. They have hairs or bristles like normal pigs, but at some time their ancestors had a "permanent wave" as Mirko puts it. So what looks like a fleece is in fact curly bristles – perhaps an adaptation to Mongolia's cold winters. Pigs of this old breed are still to be seen around Novi Sad, but nowadays modern types such as the Yorkshire are commoner. Small farmers say that the Mangalitsa are better eating.

George Sassoon
Isle of Mull

Apparently, the only other porcine strain known for such hirsutism is an extinct English one – the Lincolnshire Curly Coat. These, and many other wondrous beasts, can be seen in *Rare Breeds* by Lawrence Alderson, photographer Robert Dowling, published by Calmann and King in 1994.

Alison Kubbos
Petersham, New South Wales

Editor's note: A web search reveals many sites and some pictures of the Mangalitza or Mangalitsa breed of pig.

Otter spotter

The Dobhar-chú, the Irish 'water hound' or giant otter reported by Gary Cunningham [*FT168:40*], may indeed have a basis in fact. His article struck a chord with me immediately, because I have seen giant otters, though not in Ireland. Giant otters (*Pteronura brasiliensis*), are native to Amazonia, and grow to about 6ft (1.8m) long – though they may look much bigger. Like the Dobhar-chú, they live in freshwater. They would not attack humans, but defend themselves forcefully. Our guides said that you couldn't hunt them with dogs; if a dog follows an otter into water, the otter will kill it easily. A woman splashing about in the water, as Grace Donolly was said to be doing, might have disturbed an otter and provoked a violent reaction.

What would giant otters be doing in Ireland? Their pelts were incredibly valuable, said to be worth a year's pay in South America. The kits are sometimes captured when their parents are killed, and an 18th-century entrepreneur might have been able to make a fortune by introducing them to Ireland. Beaver and muskrat were introduced into Europe for their fur, and we also have populations of feral mink from the same source. Nor are Irish adventurers unknown in South America – the revered liberator of Chile went by the resounding name of Bernardo O'Higgins.

The descriptions of the Dobhar-chú bear out its resemblance to a giant otter. The animal described as a 'sea otter' at Achill had a white mark on its throat. Sea otters do not have such patches – but all giant otters do. Incidentally, our guides called the otters by the name 'pero de agua' – water dog, another similarity with the 'water hound' of legend.

David Hambling
By email

Highlander immortals

Relating to Beccaelizabeth's piece on Highlander [*FT167:48-49*]: on 20 October 2002, I was hit by a car doing about 40–45mph ([64–72km/h), flung over it, landed headfirst... and got right back up, having merely been angered (and given a three-day headache). I have longish hair, a collection of swords which I know how to use (including a dragon-hilted katana!), and various long coats. I'm also a Scot. I'd previously been injured in a car crash on 20 January, which fits in with the become-immortal-when-killed-unexpectedly part.

Does this mean I should be on the lookout for hostile visitors opining that "there can be only one"? It would explain a lot about the sort of year I had.

David A McIntee
Wetherby, West Yorkshire

Stick to fiction

I thank Donald Bain for so amusingly confirming my assessment of his competence as an investigative journalist [*FT165:44, 167:47*]. Not only did he miss my introductory words and the quotation marks so clearly identifying Jim Moseley's recollections, as pointed out in the *FT* editors' note to his piece. He also had trouble reading a bit of simple English. That's Defense not State Department, Mr Bain.

I respectfully suggest Mr Bain stick to the Jessica Fletcher *Murder She Wrote* novels. In those he has no need to be concerned about being confused by facts.

Karl T Pflock
Placitas, New Mexico

Devil cat

I spent an evening over Christmas at a party hosted by one of my neighbours, where as we all huddled around the coffee table in her front room, joking and telling anecdotes, I related how on occasion the larger of my two pet cats has seemed to be able to pass through walls. On occasion I have seen the cat, Peekay, a large black tom, around the house, but having gone out and locked the front door behind me, I have then been met by him at the end of the street. I had put this down to possibly being mistaken, particularly since my other cat, Missy, is also black, though very much smaller. But it had happened on enough occasions to make me wonder.

A number of jokes were made about Peekay, particularly since my neighbours have nicknamed him "DevilCat" because he can be a bit boisterous, and dislikes being touched by strangers, or pretty much anyone other than myself. We laughed at the thought that he was at home playing Westlife CDs backwards on my hifi to hear satanic messages. Suddenly, one of the other guests looked up and swore, because sitting directly behind me, on the inside of a closed window, was "DevilCat". Somehow he had got into the room, though the front door was closed, and the door to the room in which we were sitting was also shut.

Jason Hanrahan
By email

Creative subconscious

I was very interested to read Joseph Barnes' letter on "automatic dictation" [*FT167:55*]. Several years ago now, I vividly remember dreaming a song. I was standing in the control room of a studio, looking through the glass into the recording area, watching the musicians perform (Jon Lord was on keyboards, my instrument at the time, and he a hero of my youth). It was not a song I knew, but it was the best song I had ever heard. It rocked. However, on waking, in spite of my best efforts – or maybe because of them – it drifted away before I had a chance to write it down. Not quite vivid enough, then.

I am a writing musician myself, and the creative process has always struck me as being very subconscious in nature. Often, the best songs are the ones that come from nowhere, written in almost as much time as it takes to play them. Lyrics come unbidden; they can sound ridiculously inappropriate but are so insistent that the only way to find peace is to write them down. It is only later that the sense emerges – and it does. The same thing can happen with chord structures and melodies. Whereas the songs you spent hours agonising over every line and note often drift into obscurity, these unbidden ones that send coffee cups flying in all directions as you hunt desperately for pen and paper turn into gems. This also applies to playing an instrument. Think about something too much and you screw it up. Play without thinking and it can sound out of this world. Many musicians report that they often play better after not playing for a while, presumably letting the subconscious get to grips while you're off doing other things. Perhaps this is why cartoonists keep a drawing pad by the lavatory. It would be interesting to hear from anyone from other disciplines who have similar tales to tell.

The moral? If any, it must be: listen to the voices; and always go to sleep with a tape recorder by your bed. For in the morning you may be able to retire.

Years ago, I had the same dream over three consecutive mornings. It came during that period when you know you're asleep, dreaming and about to wake up, but most decidedly asleep and lost to the world. I was walking through a forest. There were no paths, but I nevertheless reached a point where I knew I had a choice to fork left or right. I chose right (I think) and was thrown into a nightmarish scenario which caused me instantly to wake up, quite shaken. However, I was aware that a part of my mind had been monitoring this and I decided that should I have the dream again, I would choose the opposite direction. The next night – or morning, rather – the same thing happened. Some conscious part of my mind tried to make me go left but failed and again I woke up disturbed. Again the resolve and on the third night, success. I had actually forced my dream to take a course that I was consciously setting out for myself. Just for the record, I don't remember what happened this last time, except that I woke up feeling relieved.

Duncan Clee
Chorlton, Manchester

"IT'S A NEW ART MOVEMENT - PLAGIARISM."

JOHN ROBERT DOCHERTY

letters

The lightness of being

Regarding John Rudkin's letter about the levitation trick ["Hands-on experience", ***FT168:55***], I have participated in this on several occasions, about 30 years ago, during late night drinking sessions at a local pub. The landlord was a huge man, at least 18–20 stone (114–127kg), yet he floated up quite effortlessly a foot or more, raised by the fingers of myself, two fairly ordinary guys and one frankly weedy one. Yet trying it out before the hands-on routine, we couldn't budge him an inch. We tried it several times taking turns to be raised, and it never failed. No chanting or practice necessary.

I also recall my mother inviting three Welsh sisters to tea when I was eight. I (an only child) didn't know them, they were all older than I was, and we were left alone until teatime in the front room to "play". They whispered and giggled among themselves, then commanded me to lie on the floor, which I did. Again using fingertips, they caused me to "levitate" almost to ceiling height (a Victorian house with very high ceilings). I can remember clearly being level with the silk lampshades. They caught me on the way down and I burst into floods of tears. To add insult to injury, my mother, who came rushing in, gently reproved me for telling fibs, saying it was quite impossible. The girls, of course, feigned ignorance. This made it all the more frightening as I knew it was true!

Erica Thomas
Rochester, Kent

I tried the levitation trick with some friends in college in the 1970s and it worked – if you were lifting someone they truly did feel as light as a feather, and if you were lifted you really did feel like you were floating; and there was no great sensation of pressure on the lifting points whether you were lifting or being lifted.

However, the method we used was slightly different from that described by Mr Rudkin. The raising points were the armpits and knees as described, but the lifters had to place the tips of their forefingers and thumbs together, then use the extended forefingers to raise the victim. The absolutely crucial part of the procedure was that prior to doing the lift the four people doing the lifting should each, in the order they stood around the 'liftee', first each place one hand palm down over the victim's head (creating a stack of hands about an inch apart above the liftee's head), then each, in the same order, place the other hand, palm down, over the stack, so producing a stack of eight hands above the victim. Then the lifters remove their hands in the opposite order (so the top hand is removed first and the bottom one last). Under no circumstances should any of the hands touch those above or below them as the stack is made, then removed – if one does, you have to start the stack again.

Nick Vale
Hartley Wintney, Hampshire

Editor's note: Several other readers commented on this subject. Diana Lyons, a retired physiotherapist, saw Uri Geller perform the levitation trick recently. She speculates: "Perhaps the hands over the subject's head momentarily disturb the flow of energy from the crown chakra. When the hands are removed, the sudden recurrence of the flow of 'chi' upwards briefly makes the subject near weightless."

Anne McCaffery writes to say she has performed the trick many times and that the lifters should count to 100 while holding their hands above the head of the person to be lifted; Darrell Hedley had them count to 20 and then down from three to one.

"I have taught many people how to levitate in the way [Mr Rudkin] describes," writes yoga teacher Melanie Watson. "The feelings of lightness are very intense, the person who is being levitated feeling almost as if they are rising out of their seat before being lifted. The people doing the lifting perform this feat without effort, and are aware of a form of energy within them. The whole thing is quite mind-boggling." Emily Browne, John Pressly, Nicola Senior and Noel Wallace also wrote in to say that they had participated in successful "levitation" experiments.

Templar treasure

I read with interest Gordon Rutter's piece in ***FT167:50*** regarding my favourite place on the planet – Rosslyn Chapel. Despite some fascinating speculations, there is no evidence whatsoever to support the idea that the Templars' treasure is hidden there. Indeed the work of my friend Mark Oxbrow shows that the St Clairs of Rosslyn actually gave evidence against the Templars at the Holyrood trial of 1309, where incidentally a verdict of 'not proven' was given in Scotland against the Order. There is no contemporary evidence that the Templars found refuge in Robert Bruce's Scotland.

I doubt that Sir William St Clair oversaw all of the chapel's carvings, as this idea originates in Father Hay's unreliable work published in 1700. Equally dubious is the assertion that St Clair was the grand master of the masons and the real founder of freemasonry in Scotland in 1441 or 1447. The supporting documents for this are the St Clair Charter of 1601/02 and a letter sent to Sir William St Clair in 1628. The latter refers to earlier documents that were apparently destroyed. The letter supports the alleged fact that the St Clairs were the hereditary patrons and protectors of the masons and hammermen in Scotland. This, however, was in the days of the Guilds, which were very different in their practices from modern Freemasons.

These papers only took on significance at the time of the formation of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1736, when the Scottish Freemasons used them to show an antiquity in Scotland that the premier Grand Lodge of England could not show. Sir William St Clair (known as the last Rosslyn after his death, having produced no male heirs)

Crashing birds

I read the reports on "crashing birds" [**FT167:52**] with interest. For several years I witnessed the same phenomenon on the window at the front of our house. We saw two or three images a year, and although most of the birds seemed to have escaped unscathed, there have been some fatalities. My uncle, a keen birdwatcher, pointed out that we had an extensive wood opposite the house. Seeing the reflection of the foliage in our windows, the birds flew towards them, thinking they were heading into the safety of the trees. Most photographs of bird impressions show trees or woodland opposite the windows.

My uncle suggested we hang garish, multicoloured objects from the window to deter the birds. We placed 'stained glass' transfers and brightly coloured ornaments, which hang from hooks in the window. In the last three years there has been only one casualty. It is tacky, but effective in sparing the birds from a nasty headache – or worse.

Michael R Haigh
Mytholmroyd, West Yorks

I thought you might like to see this example of a crashing bird taken at my mother's house near Tain in the Scottish Highlands in October 2002. There was no sign of a dead bird, but I expect it had a headache.

Melanie Clark, Wimborne, Dorset

Dave Henderson and another reader pointed out that the two bird impressions on glass photographed by Peter Grego [**FT167:52**] were identical. We reproduced the same bird's impression from two different photographs. To correct this, we reproduce one of Mr Grego's photographs, showing the two different bird impressions.

became the first Grand Master of the Scottish Grand Lodge. According to actual contemporary documentation (this time), he was seen as handing over his 'hereditary family rights' to the newly formed Grand Lodge of 'Freemasons'. This is all very interesting, but not fully understood by the 'esoteric historians' who write on the subject of Rosslyn or indeed by some of the popular Masonic authors who write 'authoritatively' on the subject.

We then move onto the mystery of the unfinished chapel. Gordon reports that the chapel is said to be a replica of Solomon's Temple. In fact, it is more akin to the floor plan of the choir area at Glasgow Cathedral, which was more accessible to the guild masons of the time than any building in the Holy Land.

Gordon repeats the speculation that the chapel remained unfinished because William St Clair's son, also called William, didn't want to spend any more money on it. Actually, William the Waster, as he was known, was cut out of his father's inheritance. The lands of Rosslyn and the chapel went in 1484 to Oliver St Clair, the eldest son of Sir William's second marriage. Perhaps Oliver couldn't be bothered to finish the chapel; however, this notion comes from Father Hay's account and the actual reasons are most likely lost to us. Many private chapels of the time remain unfinished, so in this Rosslyn is by no means unique.

Ian Robertson
Co-Author along with Karen Ralls-McLeod of The Quest for the Celtic Key (Luath Press, 2002), which has a chapter on Rosslyn Chapel
By email

Disclaimer

FT168:60 contained a brief review of *The Satanic Screen*, erroneously attributed to me. Since the mid 1980s, the book's author, "Nicholas Schreck", has incited hatred and bigotry through his public actions, writings and persona. I am unaware of any subsequent public recantation on his part, and would suggest, therefore, that *FT* readers consider this fact before supporting the author's work.

Mark Pilkington
London

It happened to me...

First hand accounts from the message board of forteantimes.com

Vanishing cowboy

Around Christmas 1981 I travelled from Kentucky to California to spend the holidays with my family.

When I arrived, the house was filled with the smell of food being prepared. I sat chatting with my eldest brother Pat. He brought me a glass of wine without asking me (I drink very little and never during the day), so I let the glass sit untouched. As soon as Pat settled in his chair with his glass of wine, my wineglass broke at the stem! No one was touching it. Pat swore and got up to get a towel. He was mad and mumbling something like "Leave us alone for a minute... it's my sister for God's sake...." I had no idea who he was talking to.

I picked up the glass and studied it while Pat got a towel. It was broken in a odd place; usually a wineglass will break at the narrowest part of the stem, or where the stem meets the base or the bowl. This glass was broken at the thickest part of the stem. I thought that was odd. While I studied my broken glass, Pat's glass, sitting on the table untouched, also broke, in the same odd place. Pat was livid. My sister-in-law seemed unsurprised. She mentioned to Pat that he should have known it would happen, after all "he" liked to break the good crystal. I asked Pat, "What does Kathy mean, you like to break the good crystal?" "Not me," he answered. I remained confused – no one was willing to explain to me that they knew the ranch to be haunted. During my stay that holiday, several more crystal glasses broke in the same way, always while the glass was untouched and in the same place on the stem.

My most frustrating experience at the ranch was on New Year's Eve. My family was having a party for their friends, most of whom were a lot older than me. I was about 27 or 28 and most of the people attending the party were at least 40. I was the only single person, and I was bored. I had almost talked myself into getting a plate of food and going upstairs to start a new book, but stalled a bit. I thought there was still a chance I might meet an unattached young man, or at least, someone more in my age group.

I glanced at the fireplace – about 12ft (3.6m) from me – and noticed a young cowboy. An honest to God cowboy! He was wearing chaps, a cowboy hat off his head and hanging from leather ties around his throat, and spurs. What kind of person comes to a New Year's Eve party dressed as a cowboy? But then I remembered I was on a working ranch that still housed and tended horses, and maybe this guy had just finished work. It was only about 8 or 8:30pm. Anyway, he was my age and looked interesting. I wanted to talk with him. My plan was to stand where I was until he looked my way – but he never looked at me. He turned towards me, looked right past me and turned to walk away. I followed him. He walked through the living room, dining room, and into the kitchen. There was a hallway off the kitchen with a bathroom. The door to the bathroom was standing open and he walked in. I decided I would wait for him. He didn't shut the door.

Another guest came from the other end of the hallway and started to swing the bathroom door shut so he could get past. He shut the door, took a couple of steps and decided to enter the bathroom himself. "Oh no," I said, "there's someone already in there!" He looked embarrassed and lightly tapped on the door. No one answered. He peeked in and found it empty. Yes, the bathroom did have a window, but it was only about 18in (46cm) wide and would have been impossible for a grown man wearing full chaps to have climbed through. Time would have been a problem as well. It was less than a minute from the time the cowboy entered the bathroom to the time the guest tapped on the door. Where did he go? I asked my sister-in-law who was standing in the kitchen at the time, if she had seen him.

"A cowboy?" she asked. "Was he wearing chaps and spurs?" She could in fact describe him, but then said she hadn't seen him that night. None of the other guests had seen him either. I later learned that different family members had seen him on other occasions. There must have been 20-30 people at the party. I was the only one who saw the cowboy that night and I had had only one drink.

After that New Year's Eve my family told me that they suspected the ranch to be haunted. I couldn't believe it. The cowboy I saw was real, solid, not some gauzy wispy thing. They agreed. One other apparition they witnessed, a sea captain from the 19th century, also seemed solid and real but could come and go in an instant. This would often be witnessed by two or three family members at the same time.

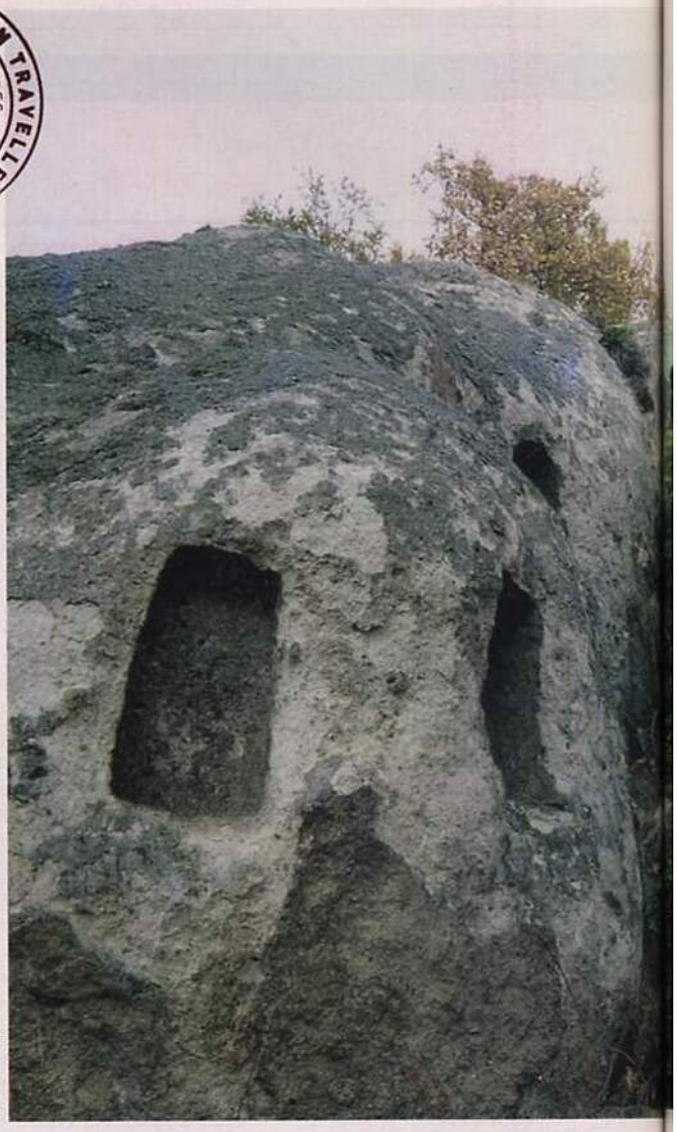
Mysterious burning smells had also drifted through the house and they called the fire department. Firefighters came, and could also smell the mysterious odour, but couldn't identify it either. They called the sewer control authorities. They could smell it, but nothing registered on their equipment. The fire chief admitted that this wasn't the first time they had been called to the ranch for the same occurrence. In fact, it was pretty commonplace. Poltergeist activity was frequent and ranged from flying skillets to the shoving of family members.

Carla Griffin
Louisville, Kentucky

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

21. Beehive Stones, Bükkalja, Hungary

TOM CHRYSTAL wonders who was responsible for Hungary's mysterious 'Beehive Stones'



TOM CHRYSTAL

Hungary is best known for its Great Plain, but between the northern cities of Eger and Miskolc lie the low mountains of the Bükk plateau. On their southern slopes the eruptions of the Miocene Epoch have left layers of volcanic rock. Twenty million years of erosion involving the actions of thermal springs have resulted in the long valleys and wooded ridges of the Bükkalja, where dense beech forest meets the famous Bulls Blood vineyards of Eger. Looming up through the trees along the valley slopes are cone-shaped outcrops and towers of rhyolite. Locals call the outcrops *kaptárkövek*, or 'beehive stones'.

There are hundreds of similar outcrops all over Hungary's hills, but the beehive stones of the Bükkalja are unique. Some examples are almost 50 ft (15 m) tall and carved into their smooth surface are rectangular compartments measuring two feet (60cm) high, a foot (30cm) across and a foot (30cm) deep; 558 compartments have been found on over 100 stones. Any explanation as to who carved the holes, when they did it and for what reason continues to elude Hungarian historians.

Hungarian archæology was notoriously under-funded throughout the Communist period; any research that did take place was focused on supporting the popular idea that the modern workers' state was founded by the ninth-century Magyars. Today, funds available for archæological research are usually earmarked for the country's many Roman ruins or high profile excavations abroad. As a result, Hungarian scholarship has been thin on the ground. Exceptions are the research of Dr András Saád in the 1970s and Csaba Baráz's comprehensive overview in *Kaptárkövek A Bükkalján* (Beehive Stones in the Bükkalja), published in 1999. Unlike similar carved stones in Bulgaria and Turkey, Hungary's beehive stones have attracted little attention from foreign researchers.

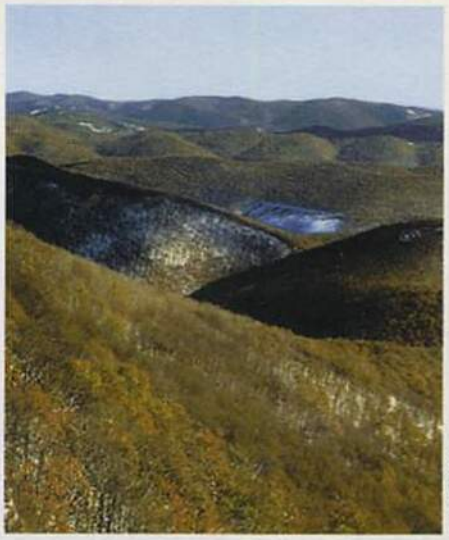
Although research has been minimal, there are many legends about the stones. They have been described as everything from Celtic sacrificial altars or the gravestones of fourth-century Hun chieftains to the resting places of the ashes of Magyar chiefs who had died during the pagan uprising against King Stephen in the 11th century. It is also believed that the stones were prayer sites of the outlawed Czech Hussites who lived in the northern forests during the 15th century. The discovery of a cross carved into one of the stones has prompted the belief that the compartments were carved by hermits in tribute to people who had given alms. Another group of stones has a different legend: Hungarian soldiers trying to escape the Ottoman army quickly carved the compartments to give the Turks the impression that they were manning a formidable fort.

Legends notwithstanding, the stories are based on a combination of folk memory and what is actually known about the peoples who passed through the region. The Bükk highlands saw their fair share of the great migrations into, and invasions of, the Carpathian Basin. Until the arrival of the Romans, most of the region was disputed by northern Celts, southern Illyrians and eastern Scythians. The Roman Empire's annexation of Pannonia, to the west of the Danube, had little impact on the northern hills. The Roman Empire receded, but in AD 420 Attila the Hun set up camp on the plains. The Huns concentrated on plundering the riches of Western Europe, but there is little evidence that they would have bothered with the sparsely populated and heavily forested northern hills. After the Huns came Teutonic Longobards, proto-Slavs and Turkic-Bulgars. In AD 557 the Avars invaded from the east. For 250 years they ruled over the region. The Avars declined in the late eighth century, after which the Carpathian Basin was divided precariously between the Frankish and Moravian empires. By the time the Magyars and their Turkic allies, the Kabars, invaded in AD 896, the region was probably sparsely populated.

TOM CHRYSTAL

TOM CHRYSTAL

LEFT: Some stones are so remote that you need a compass to find them. BELOW: The Bükk hills were considerably less wooded in mediæval times



TAMÁS SZITTA

in the Bükk before King Matthias drove them out in 1472 also kept bees in the stones. The village of Szomolya, close to a particularly impressive row of stones with dozens of compartments, gets its name from *smola*, the Czech word for wax or tar. It is not clear whether the name of the village dates back to the 17th-century settlement of Slovaks in the region or to the Hussite period.

Another explanation is that bee-keeping was introduced during the 16th-and 17th-century Ottoman occupation. There is little trace of it today, but on the hill above the village of Cserépváralja, 9 miles (15 km) north-east of Eger, there once stood a castle. Originally a Magyar stronghold, this northern outpost was easily captured by the Ottomans. Far enough from important centres, such as Eger, where the border between Habsburg- and Ottoman-occupied Hungary was contested with terrible consequences for the local peasantry, Cserépváralja and other settlements would have enjoyed a certain amount of stability. The pragmatic Ottomans were more interested in taxing the local population than winning its unswerving loyalty. For the peasants, their Ottoman landlords were no worse than the Hungarian nobles, and where conditions were militarily stable they would have continued to produce food and herd animals. It is likely that honey, as an occasional reward on foraging trips for other forest produce, would have been known to the forest-dwellers. Not far from Cserépváralja there are four beehive stones with over 25 compartments. If the Ottomans introduced the concept of 'farming' honey, then it is likely that the trails they cut along the ridges of the Bükk also carried valuable commodities such as forest honey.

Unfortunately, there is no written evidence that the Ottoman army set the Magyar villagers to work as apiarists, although an examination of Ottoman texts of the time might throw some light onto the theory. Some bee-keeping experts disagree with the apiary theory: not all compartments face the direction of the best light and not all of the structures are suitable. Many stones, bee-keepers claim, are also difficult to access. This last point can be refuted easily. Not far from some beehive stones, there are caves dug into the soft volcanic rock. It is thought that they were built around the same time as the compartments were carved. There are many such caves in the Bükk and the ones set on the slopes above villages were occupied until the late 20th century and are now wine cellars. In the more remote forest caves there is usually a trough carved into one wall, which suggests that the caves were either stables or, as was the custom among rural peoples worldwide, the Magyars shared their living space with their draught animals. A very elaborate example of a forest cave is Kálmántanya Köhodály near the village of Kács, 12 miles (20 km) southwest of Miskolc. The cave, over 330ft (100m) long, was dug so deeply into the hillside that carved columns of rock were left in place to support the ceiling. Here too, there is a line of trough-like structures along the walls and it was used for stock keeping until fairly recently. As with the beehive stones, archæologists are uncertain who built the Köhodály but less than two kilometres (1.2 miles) away lie the remains of a 10th-century Magyar fort. The caves suggest that this area, now covered in forest, was once a centre of economic activity, perhaps serving the hill forts in the manner of home farms, or providing shelter for the beekeepers watching over the hives.

Locals believed that Hussite outlaws kept bees

As for the objection that the stones are too remote and difficult to access, it is true that although some stones lie conveniently near the old forest trails many are so well hidden in the deep woodland that to find them requires a compass. There is even speculation that there are more examples to be uncovered. But the dense woodland found in the Bükk Hills today is likely to have been a lot thinner in mediæval times when the demand for timber would have been great.

Out of all the theories and legends, the bee-keeping theory is the most widely accepted today. A cross carved in one compartment and the image of what appears to be a warrior on one beehive stone suggest different uses over the centuries or the day-dreaming scratchings of forest workers. Unfortunately, until extensive research is carried out, archæologists, historians and enthusiastic amateur researchers can only speculate about the identity of the origin and function of Hungary's beehive stones.

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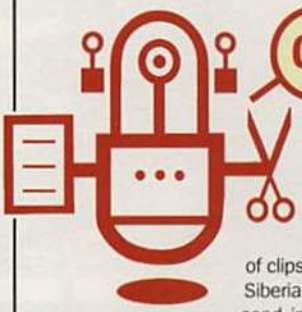

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874-1932). Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown. From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Elsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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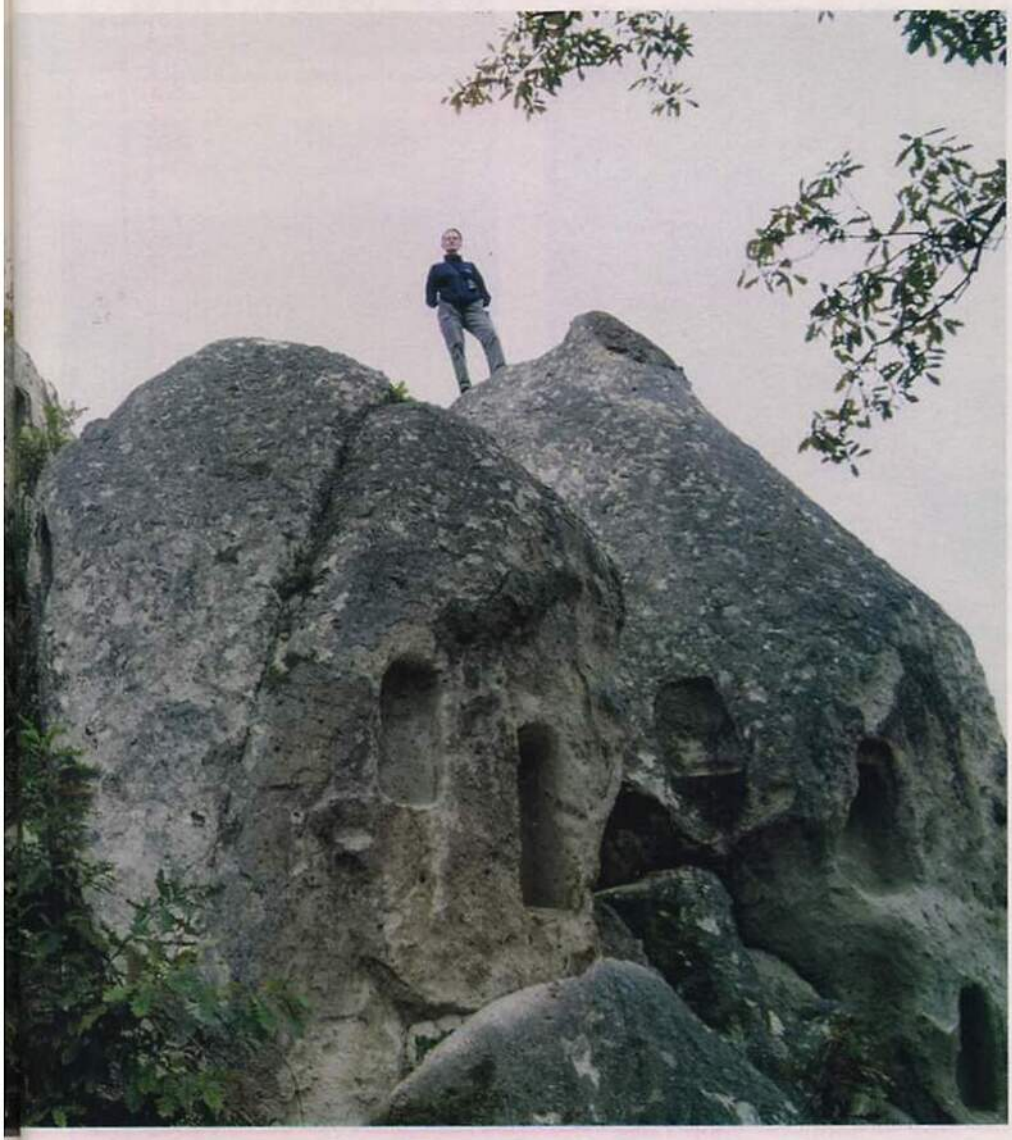
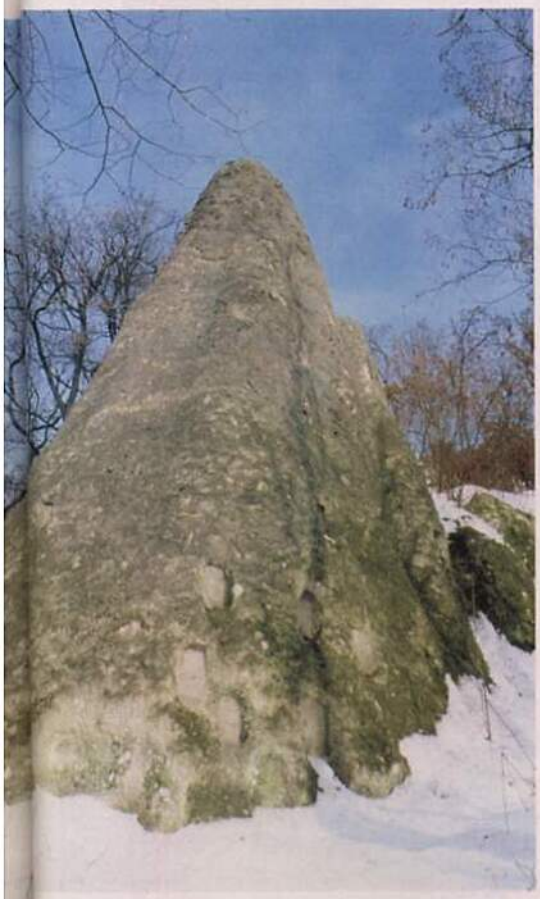




LEFT AND BELOW: While conical formations such as these exist elsewhere, the carved-out compartments are unique to Hungary's 'Beehive Stones'.

Paganism prevailed for some time after King Stephen

If any of the pre-mediæval conquerors mentioned above took such care to dig out these rectangular holes for ritual use, there is no evidence for it. The many tumuli and earth forts found in the hills today are erroneously attributed to the Avars, although the evidence suggests that they built their settlements on the plain. There are similar stones with carved compartments in Bulgaria and Iran and these are thought to have been sites for placing the ashes of the dead. Unfortunately, there is no evidence for the same practice in Hungary. Nineteenth- and 20th-century speculations about pre-Christian religious practice in early Hungary are based on the dubious claims that the early Magyars had shamans similar to those of the Samoyed peoples of northern Siberia. This theory is supported by the widely held belief that the Hungarian and Samoyed languages are of common origin. In fact, the only evidence of Magyar burials is on the Great Plain where excavated graves show that the remains of Magyar chiefs were not burned but buried in the Central Asian style, along with their horses and weapons. It is not too speculative to consider that the use of prominent and unusual stones as altars was prevalent in the pre-Christian era. A brief look at the toponymy of Hungary's hills demonstrates that the stones have long been associated with ritual or the supernatural. Many stone and boulder outcrops have oltár (altar), *pap* (priest), *bálvány* (idol), *kecske* (goat), and *ördög* (devil) names. This would seem to support the idea that the stones served as secret prayer sites during and after AD 1000, when King Stephen converted the pagan Magyars to western Christianity. As the Hungarian archæologist Gyula László pointed out, the widely-held popular belief that the 11th-century conversion of the Magyars was rapid and total should be tempered by the likelihood that earlier religious practices probably continued among remote communities. The ban on sacrifices at trees and stones later set down by St Ladislav (1077–1131) suggests that paganism prevailed for some time after King Stephen's campaign.

Another area of enquiry is the collective name for the stones: kaptárkö. The Hungarian language has travelled a long way since tribes belonging to the Finno-Ugric language group parted company at the River Ob in Russia. On its long journey south and then west to the Carpathian Plain, the Hungarian language has absorbed Turkic, Iranian and Slavic words. Csaba Baráz has examined the etymological origins of the word *kaptár* and suggests that it is cognate with the Bulgar-Turkic *käp* or Bulgar-Slav, *kap* (statue, or idol). The Hungarian word *kép* (picture) has long had religious connotations, for example, *Szentkép* (sacred image).

Perhaps the true function of the stones is revealed in the literal translation of their local name: *kaptár*, simply 'beehive'. Although Hungarians cannot remember why the stones have always been called this, apart from perhaps a reference to their conical shape, the most popular theory supported by many Hungarian historians is that the compartments *were* beehives. Supporting the bee-keeping theory is the tendency of carved compartments to face south and south east. Furthermore, a few examples have a raised lip which might have been for the attachment of the bee-hive cover; and excavations at one site uncovered fragments of honeycomb. Bee-keeping in the Bükk's stones might have been practised as far back as the ninth century. The disappearance of the practice and the subsequent confusion of myths about the stones can be attributed to the many periods of instability when invasions by Tartars, Czech Hussites and Ottomans forced peasants to abandon their settlements. In the past, locals believed that the highly-organised Hussite outlaws who lived

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND FORTEAN TIMES FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM FT'S PAST.

As a fortean veteran, looking back over the decades, I'm struck by the sheer diversity of the phenomena we reported and these months seem fairly typical. I'm pleased to say this variety still excites me after all this time; the conjunctions add another layer of surrealism to stories that are, in themselves, oddities.

JUNE 1973

Consider this fatal tableau from out first issue. In Austria, a golden eagle was seen to swoop on a fox and carry it high in the air. The fox managed to fasten its jaws on the bird's throat and the pair were dashed onto rocks below, still locked in their death struggle. ***FT1:3***

This was also the month in 1973 that the famous 'monkey boy' was discovered in the jungle of Sri Lanka. Dubbed Tissa (after the village to which he was taken) and thought to be aged about 12, he had been living with a troupe of monkeys for some time. Tissa could not speak except in barks and yelps and crawled on all fours. ***FT1:14***

From the sublime to the ridiculous! In Los Angeles a man was feted after being hit by a bolt of lightning that welded the zipper on his trousers. ***FT2:18***

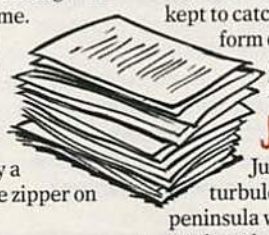
JUNE 1983

Throughout this month, sightings of the Beast of Exmoor proliferated in all its feline forms. One FT reader in Devon sent me a mug and T-shirt commemorating the Beast ... which was nice. ***FT40:60***

There were two falls on the south coast of England, both on the same day: the 5th. A crab fell out of the sky at Brighton. Admittedly, that could have been dropped by a bird but then how do we explain the hundreds of lumps of coke (the coal-like fuel, not the drug) that fell onto lawns, gardens and paths in Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch? One investigating meteorologist "picked up 92 pieces and left many others" at one location alone. ***FT42:10***

A FEMALE VAMPIRE WAS TO RISE FROM HER GRAVE...

In Thornton, California, a Catholic bishop ordered an investigation into reports that a four-foot statue of Our Lady of Fatima was weeping and teleporting about a local church. After cleaners, on several days, found the 60lb statue had moved from its habitual location, a vigil was kept to catch it in the act. Tears were seen to form on its right eye and run down its face to drop onto its folded hands. ***FT43:19***



JUNE 1993

June 1993 seemed to be a pretty turbulent month. Siberia's Kamchatka peninsula was rocked by a 7.1 Richter earthquake (8 June), which created a tsunami wave as far away as Hawaii. Two weeks later and closer to home, a smaller (3 Richter) quake rumbled under Cumbria. Massive swarm of locusts pestered Somalia and Hungary, the latter being the first in 60 years.

Southeast Asia was swamped by a severe monsoon while flooding in the USA was said to be the worst in a century. Not to be outdone, Wales also suffered a "storm of the century" (11 June) and Cornwall experienced its heaviest downpour in 500 years (9 June). ***FT71:47***

On the 11th, the carcass of a large, unidentified reptilian washed up on a beach in Gambia. It was 15-ft-long and tapered fore and aft with a long 'beak' and tail. Writing in ***FT67:35-37***, Karl Shuker describes it as resembling a plesiosaur, mosasaur, ichthyosaur or thalatosuchian "but all of these supposedly died out by the end of the Cretaceous Era, about 64 million years ago."

On the 8th, hundreds of sparrows, pigeons, finches and other small birds were seen to plummet from a clear sky over Swords, Co Dublin, littering gardens with dead and dying birds. This was not reported in the press but described to us by a reader. ***FT71:64***

Meanwhile, that same day, in the Peruvian town of Pisco, thousands of people gathered at the graveyard following a widespread rumour that a female vampire was to rise from her grave that night. Folk danced and drank as witchdoctors splashed holy water on the grave. The town's houses were decked in garlic and pregnant women left town in case the fiend reincarnated in one of their babies. However, the crowd, including TV and radio reporters, were disappointed as Sarah Ellen Roberts failed to return from the dead. The ominous story, spread by the newspaper *Expresso*, claimed Sarah Roberts had been condemned for a witchcraft murder and sealed alive in a lead-lined coffin and her husband had sailed the world seeking a place to bury her. She is said to have vowed to resurrect herself on the 80th anniversary of her entombment to exact her revenge. The only known facts in the case establish that Sarah Roberts died in Pisco on 9 June 1913. Her husband, John, paid five pounds for her burial and was never seen again. Just how this escalated into a full-blown vampire scare is not known. ***FT71:10***

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